

LONDON READER

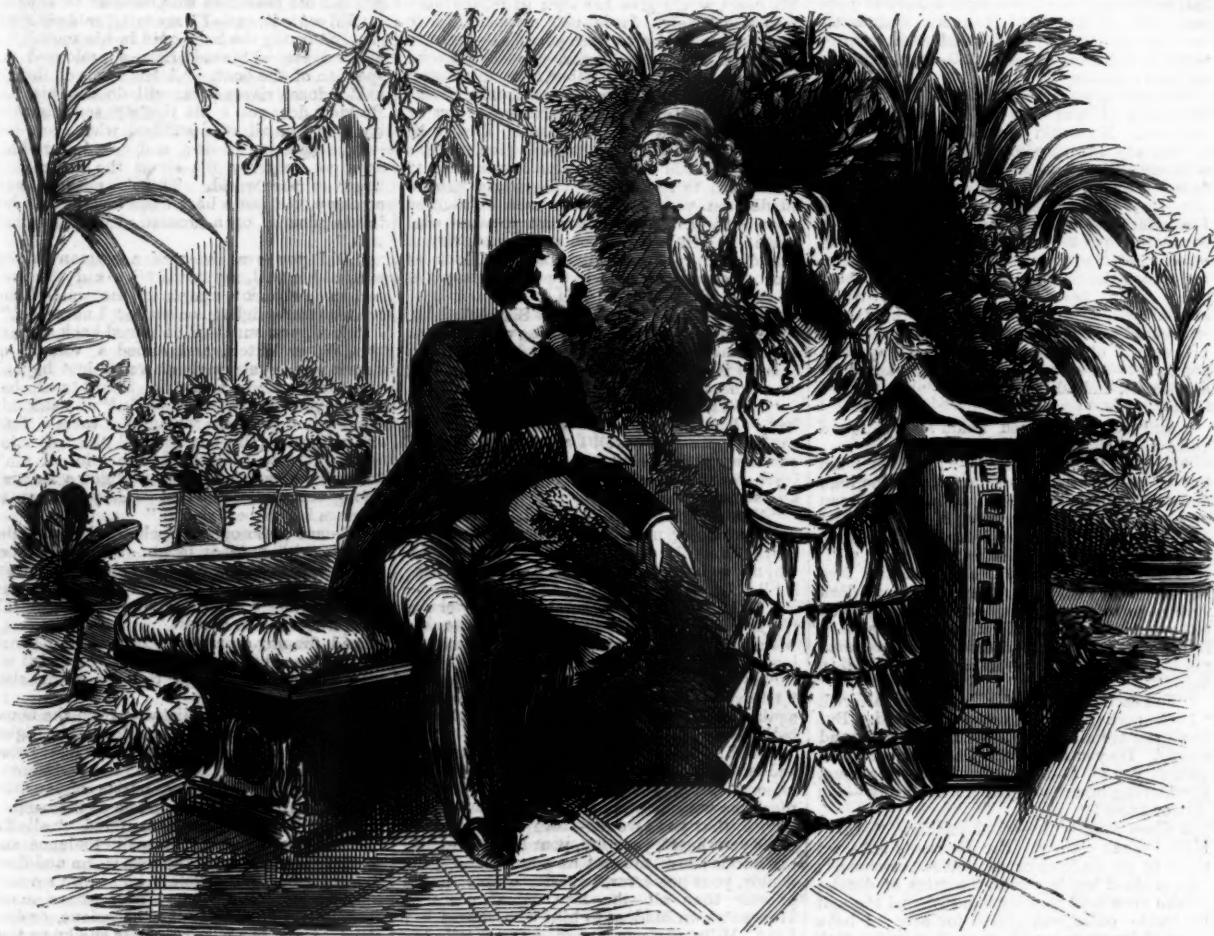
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No. 1029.—VOL. XL.

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 20, 1883.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[A DARK COMPACT.]

MILDRED'S INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOVE'S FIRST WHISPER.

"HELP her—guide her!"

It was the same cry that had echoed so piteously through the wards of Saint Oswald's when his patient was wandering through the dim border-land that lies between life and death—it was the same trembling appeal that had burst from her lips when she found herself on the threshold of a new world, dazzled by the brightness of the future, the darkness of the past.

"Help her—guide her!"

A great wave of pity and tenderness seemed to sweep over his heart, carrying with it all doubt, hesitancy, fear.

"My darling!" he whispered, clasping the trembling hands in his own, "what is it that terrifies you? Tell me—trust me. Did you not promise that you would do so, always and ever? Have you forgotten our pledge of friendship so soon?"

She did not answer for a moment. The beautiful dark eyes lifted to his face seemed dilated with some horror. She could not speak; her breath was coming in short, nervous gasps.

"Can you not tell me?" he went on, in a voice quickened by anxiety. "Who has taught you to doubt—to fear me? What has turned you from me like this? You cannot know what pain it has caused me to find you shrinking from me thus in loathing, in fear!"

"I—I shrink from you?" she repeated, tremulously. "I loathe and fear you? Oh, no, no, no!"

"Then what is it?" he asked. "What has come between us? Is it that I recall scenes of pain and suffering, the very thought of which has become horrible to you? Do you wish to forget Saint Oswald's, and the long, dreary days spent there? Ah, well, perhaps it is only natural; but if you would forget, I must remember. Those days of anxiety have left an impression on my heart too deep to be erased. Forget me, you may—I cannot forget you!"

The ashen hue had left her face; the hunted, frightened look had faded in her eyes; some

chord seemed to have been touched in her heart that hushed all other sounds. She was listening to him—listening wrapt and breathless, as if to some strange, entrancing music, of which she must not miss a note,—listening as one born deaf when nature's harmony first bursts on his unsealed ears.

But her silence seemed to him coldness, indifference. How was he to know? What man can ever know the strange, sweet, reverent hush with which woman's heart bounds at the coming of its king.

"I cannot forget you," he went on, bitterly. "It is folly, of course—madness; but in those days of doubt, and fear, and anxiety, when I watched you trembling between death and life, my patient, whose frail barque I seemed to be guiding over dark seas of peril and uncertainty, grew to be more than patient had ever been before. I learned to think of you—to watch over you—to pray for you as my own!"

His own! The low, deep-spoken words seemed to fill the world with their music. His own—his own! He went on:

"If you had died—Heaven forgive me! but during the last few days the wild, wicked wish



has come to me that you had died—I would have thought of you thus for ever; you would have been the sweetest, saddest, purest memory of my life; whatever ties I might have formed, there would have been a shrine in my deepest heart kept sealed and sacred to a lost hope—an forgotten dream! But you lived. I watched your coming back to life, and health, and strength with a gladness as great as that of the mother who sees the bloom of youth and health once more mantling the pale, wasted features of her child; and when you stood at last before me, in all the regal beauty of your womanhood, I still felt there was a tie between us—that the old tenderness of protection, of confidence, lingered—that you were still my own—my own!

"It was a wrench when at last you went from me. I was for awhile shocked, bewildered. My world seemed to have lost its centre, my life its aim. Yet your image was with me still—in my thoughts, in my dreams, in my prayers. I pictured you in your new life—its joys, its hopes, its troubles, its fears. I wondered if you were ill or well, happy or sorrowful, quiet or glad. I thought of you often wandering under these old oaks, or dreaming among the roses, or straying through these quiet halls, bewildered by the new world around you, sighing perhaps for the friend who could understand its perplexity, its pain. I dreamed of you as shy, and happy, and sorrowful—as everything but—she paused for a moment, and added, bitterly—"but what I found."

"And what have you found?" she found voice to whisper.

"A queen!" he answered—"to whom I am but as the least of her slaves; a star too high and distant for ought but worship; a woman to whom I am only a memory of darkness and dread—a ghastly image of disease and death—a spectre whose presence deadens all joy—I, who came here only to look upon the face whose absence had made the whole world dark to me—to hear the voice that had grown to be the sweetest of all music in my ear—to gaze into your eyes and read there, perhaps, that my love, my hope, my worship, were not all in vain."

"You came for this—for this?" she faltered. "I—I—perhaps I do not understand. But you—you are always true—true, and wise, and strong. Do you mean that I have grieved you, pained you? I—I—ah!" she drew a long, shuddering breath—"you do not know—you do not know!"

"Know what?" he asked quickly. "Milly! Milly! speak plainly. For Heaven's sake, let there be no shadows or mysteries between us; I have stood beside you at the gates of death; I have held your icy hand when I thought its feeble pulse was stilled for ever; I have listened for your breath when I thought each would be your last. Can you not trust him who was your friend in such dire extremity? What is it I do not know?"

Her bowed head was turned from him. A cold, clear voice seemed whispering in her ear the words that had fallen upon her trembling heart a few nights ago like drops of ice, "Too lightly won—too lightly won! Man himself despises the heart too lightly won."

And yet, yet—oh, if she but dared to lift her eyes to his face and let him read her secret there—to put her hands in his with sweet, confiding trust—to speak the words that were trembling on her lips. If she but dared.

"What is it I do not know?" he repeated, in a colder, sterner tone. "Are you bound to another? Have you learned already to love? Tell me, and end this mockery at once, child, I can bear it. Have you learned to love?"

"Yes," the answer came softly and slowly—"I have learned to love."

He drew a quick breath, like one who had received a stab.

"Then forgive me," he continued, "if it is presuming too much to question further, but it is in your interest I ask. Does your uncle know the gentleman and approve?"

"I—I think so," she faltered. "I am sure he would approve."

"One more question, and I have done for ever." The speaker paused, for it seemed to him a lightning flash and suddenly revealed all things to his blinded eyes. "Is it—tray, I am quite sure it is your Cousin Jasper?"

"Cousin Jasper!" she repeated. "No. I like him very much; he is kind and good to me. But could anyone love Cousin Jasper?"

"I think one could," was the grave reply. "I think the woman whom he found worthy of his heart would give her own in return both well and wisely. It is not my privilege to question, to advise, to warn you; but—butf in the days that are to come, you should ever need a friend, a—brother, remember that this night's pang does not break the pledge between us. In light and darkness, in joy or sorrow, through life and death, I will be always—your friend. You will give me this place at least in your thoughts, in your heart? It is hard to feel that I am only a painful shadow on your life—I who would brighten your path with Heaven's most pleasant sunshine. I will trouble you no more with my idle dreams, my groundless hopes. Look at me; give me your hand in a parting clasp; but as say good-night as friends."

She turned to him slowly. She lifted her eyes to his. They were brimming with tears, sweet tears. She held out her hand, and he clasped it for a moment with a pressure that was almost pain.

"It is good-night," he said, in a low, toned key, "but it is also good-bye. You will not see me again until—well I cannot say—until I can meet you without hope, without pain. I leave here to-morrow morning. I am going abroad next week."

"Next week!" she faltered. "You are going away for months, for years, perhaps for ever. Going to leave me in the darkness. Oh, no, no! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

"Milly! Milly!" he cried, almost sternly. "What does this mean? You sadden me with doubt, suspense. You have learned to love, you say, and yet—yet—"

"Aye, I have learned to love," she repeated. "I have learned to love, even as I learned again to live. It is you—you have taught me both."

"I—I—" The shrouded face broke into sudden light. "It was I who taught you the lesson? Milly, you are too true, too pure, to mock me with delusive hopes. Do you mean, indeed, that you love me—love me enough to trust your heart, your life, your happiness, into my hands; love me not as your friend, your doctor, your preserver, but with a love that is greater than all the love woman gives at Heaven's own bidding to him who shares her life? Milly, can you love me—as my wife?"

His voice grew low and musical as he spoke the word—the strange, sweet word, that thus cadenced echoed in her heart for ever.

A soft breeze was whispering among the roses, the low twitter of a waking bird came from the vines that wreathed the window.

It seemed to her over afterwards as if that moment stood apart, glorified, transfigured, like a dazzling peak on her life-path, from which she was to reckon her way.

But just now that low, deep whisper seemed to fill the universe. It hushed all—echoes of doubt, of pride, of fear. Simply and earnestly she lifted her eyes to his, and in the gladness of their starry light heard her answer, even before her lips had framed it; the answer that has been a thrilling note of sweetness through all the discords of human life ever since human life began—love's trembling "Yes."

"Yes," she said, and all her heart was in that word.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNEXPECTED REVELATION.

Jasper Vernon had stopped for a while at the boat-house, to see his little craft safely embarked, and then he made his way to the house, whither his friend had preceded him.

Both were conscious of a new constraint upon their usual frank and brotherly intercourse—a constraint that their mutual efforts at gaiety could not dispel.

It was with a sense of relief they parted, Gerald being obliged to hurry to the house, to receive letters of importance which he expected by the evening post.

It was fully half-an-hour before Jasper Vernon followed him—for there was something wrong about the rudder of the Water Witch which had to be discussed with the grizzled old coastman who had her in charge.

"I'll see to it, sur—I'll see to it," said old Phil, slowly turning the huge quid in his mouth, as he straightened himself from a prolonged inspection of the boat. "A few drops of oil and half a dozen rivets or so will do the business. Rudders does get a bit jigglely sometimes—kicks on you all of a sudden, when you are least expecting it; and when a rudder does get contrary, it's about the contraryest thing in the world. There's nothing can come up to it but a horse when he takes the bit in his mouth, or a woman driven 'gin her will."

"Did you ever hear of a woman driven against her will, my friend?" asked the doctor, as he struck a match on the wall of the boat-house to light his cigar. "I never did."

"Well, yes, sur"—Phil leaned back against the Water Witch, and aimed a volume of tobacco-juice unerringly at a rock just beyond the door—"I think I have; and he between you and I, sur"—old Phil sank his voice to a prudent whisper—"there's half the wimmen folks that are all the better for feeling it's a master holds the rein. I ain't for driving sur, but when you got a skittish young creature to manage—wal, y'll have to manage her as best you can."

"Sound philosophy, Uncle Phil," said the doctor, with another laugh. "I'll remember it. See that skittish boat of ours is brought under proper rule before we venture out in her again, or a capital of wind may bring all our philosophy to naught."

And flinging a piece of silver on the bench beside the old man, Jasper slowly wended his way homeward through the deepening shadows.

He was so distant from the house he could not see the lights gleaming through the trees; the light-robed forms flitting in and out of the open windows; he could hear the gay bursts of laughter mingling with the joyous music of the band.

"All for her!" he murmured—"all for her!" At her coming, the spell of silence and solitude is broken; cold hearts warm and dead lives blossom, and loveless homes waken into life and joy. Did woman ever weave so unconscious a spell? Is it unconscious, or does she dream of her power? Does she know that honour, friendship, pride, ambition—all the threads of which I have woven life—would snap at her bidding like withes of straw? Does she guess that I grudge the light of her eye, the sound of her voice, the touch of her hand, to those fools that are doubtless gathering around her, like moths around a flame? Does she dream—nay, she cannot, she never must—of the wild demon that wakens in my heart when he is near her?—Gerald Fairfax! Aye, he is one of the men that women love despite themselves. He is one that would win without an effort that for which I must needs struggle, suffer—aye, perhaps sin! Have I not stopped already to turn their lives asunder? Aye, I will stoop again! Stoop! Nay, I will crawl like the reptile in the dust to win!"

He flung away his cigar, and drew nearer the house. He was in his loose floating-suit, and must make a more fitting toilet ere he joined any of the gay groups gathered in the drawing-room and balls. Floods of light streamed through the open windows and doors. The vivid observation he passed along the western porch, where there was but one wide, low window that seemed darkened and closed, compelling his attention. A glow of light

He had scarcely reached it, when a familiar voice struck upon his ear, in tones of such passionate pain that he stopped suddenly, almost unconsciously.

"One more question," it asked in the stern accents of a man who is holding his burning heart in check—"one more question, and I have done for ever! Is it your Cousin Jasper?"

"My Cousin Jasper!" repeated a melodious voice, that the listener stilled his very breathing to hear—"my Cousin Jasper!" Ah, with what maddening indifference she spoke the name! "He is good and kind to me, and I like him very much; but could any one love Cousin Jasper?"

And standing there in the shadow, with whitened face and compressed lips, and eyes that gleamed with a strange, cold light, Jasper Vernon heard all.

Learned men tell us of strange convulsions of nature that in a moment undo the work of centuries: of fierce upheavals of earth's bosom, when valleys are uplifted and mountains rent asunder, and mighty seas swell over lost continents, and all is at once wreck and birth.

Some such awful change seemed to come over Jasper Vernon to-night, as he stood there in the shadow listening to the low, rapturous whispers of the lovers, and the whispers that told for him hope was dead.

Hope! It was so strange a thing for him to hope! He had scarcely recognized the presence of that brightest of earth's angels until to-night! He who analyzed everything else had never stopped to analyze that most wonderful of all mysteries—a human heart.

Love had seemed to him a womanly weakness—too light and soft a thing for the cold, dazzling heights on which his mighty intellect sat enthroned.

He might marry—indeed, he rather contemplated doing so, with a philosophical resignation. Daisy Seymour, for instance, he had regarded for years with a friendly eye.

She was bright, captivating, and had a little fortune of her own, that would add materially to the comforts of married life. In fact, he had learned to look upon an understanding with Daisy as a near and not undesirable contingency.

But as for love—the wild, absorbing love, of which poets and romancers rave—Jasper only smiled at the thought.

His beautiful cousin had at first only aroused his interest. She was something new, different from the types of womanhood he had met. He had studied her, as he would a strange flower, an unknown star.

Walking, driving, boating, she had been his companion. The first flush of the summer morning, the sunlit allée of the summer noon, the dewy fragrance of the summer eve, had found him at her side.

He had found his proud mind bending to her ignorance as it had never bent to ignorance before. He had found his cold reason yielding, and his cynic eye softening, and a new, undelimited tenderness pervading his heart and soul when she was near.

And yet he had been warned—not even when Gerald Fairfax's coming had stirred the smouldering flame in his bosom into sudden life and light.

She seemed to him so weak, so ignorant, so easily led and governed, and he was so strong, so wise!

So strong, so wise! and yet to-night a woman's whisper had hurled him from the mountain heights on which he had stood so proudly, and left him in depths of which, until now, he had not dreamed.

It was long after midnight when Gerald Fairfax entered his friend's study. The old maidservant had been brought out, and the room was in a very fog of smoke, through which Jasper Vernon's outlines could only be seen dimly against the moonlit window.

"My dear fellow, you look like a wizard in a black robe," was the light, cheerful greeting. "Why were you not one of the revellers to-night? I heard more than one silvery voice

inquiring, in tones of unmistakable disappointment, for Jasper Vernon."

"I was tired"—the smoker removed his pipe from his mouth, and answered in his usual deliberate tone—"too tired to do justice to the occasion. I judged, by appearances, it was rather a festive one, and thought it best to retreat. How did you enjoy it?"

"Enjoy it!" echoed the younger voice, in tones of triumph—"enjoy it! I can scarcely tell you how. My dear boy, it's been a night of nights—the happiest, the most satisfactory, the most joyful of my life! There's no one I would rather place confidence in than yourself; but when I came down here I thought things looked rather shaky for me, so I kept my hopes and fears to myself. But it's all over, my boy. Everything is right between us now and for ever. Congratulate me on having won the loveliest woman in the world. Your cousin Milly has promised to be my wife."

"I congratulate you!" There was not a tremor in Jasper Vernon's tone, though the hand he held out to Gerald Fairfax was cold as ice. "I congratulate you and—her. Sit down and tell me about it, my dear fellow. I am just in the mood for a confidence. You might give some points that I would find valuable when I venture on similar ground. How was the fair and coy one so quickly won?"

There was the slightest possible sneer in the tone, but the happy lover did not notice it. His heart was too full of its own bliss.

"How? Well, I can scarcely tell you it—all emerged so successfully out of a chaos of doubt and pain. I had almost given up hope, though I came down here for the one purpose of telling her how I loved her. My dear fellow, you're one of the lucky, sensible sort that don't go through such agonies, so you can't understand what I've endured for the past six weeks—since she left me, in fact. You see, she had grown to be so much a part of my life—I had been holding her back from the gates of death so long—I had watched every breath, and every glance, and every pulse-throb, until—You're laughing at me for a soft-headed fool this moment, Vernon—I know you are."

"Laughing? Not at all!" answered Jasper knocking the ashes from his pipe. "There's a professional flavour in your remarks that makes them very interesting. Go on, my dear fellow! You counted her pulse, you say?"

"The devil! I didn't say anything of the sort!" said Gerald, laughing. "You'd take the romance out of a Provençal troubadour, Vernon. In plain, sober English, I fell desperately in love with your cousin, and couldn't rest until I came down here, and saw what chances there were in my favour. I thought at first they were less than nothing—she was so bewitchingly coy; and then that remark of yours the other day about my having left an unpleasant impression floored me completely. If it hadn't been for a lucky chance that threw us together to-night I believe I would have left to-morrow without saying a word. And the oddest part of it all was—I don't mind telling you now, my dear fellow," and Gerald Fairfax laid his hand laughingly on his friend's shoulder—"I've been in some vague inexplicable way, suspicious of you."

"Of me?" asked Jasper, drily.

"Of you," repeated Gerald Fairfax, with a hearty laugh. "It was absurd, of course; but for a while, I was tortured by suspicion of a love affair between Milly and you. It only shows what a fool love makes of a man—what a jealous, selfish, suspicious fool!"

"A fool indeed!" said Jasper Vernon, with a bitter laugh, as he laid aside his pipe and rose. "And well, if it makes men nothing worse than fools," he murmured, as after a gay good-night his friend turned from the door.

"Well, if it makes men nothing worse than fools!" he repeated, in a low, hoarse whisper. "But there was more than folly in my heart to-night when he sat there boasting of his triumph. There was that which makes the madman the murderer say 'I—and he

clenched his icy hand—"let me beware—let me beware! There is a demon roused within me that may make me a madman—a murderer yet!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DARK COMPACT.

BREAKFAST was over when Jasper Vernon made his appearance next morning.

His sister was standing by the vine-curtained window of the little breakfast-room, waiting to pour out his cup of coffee.

It was a part of the graceful charm of their manner; but this brother and sister were never wanting in the trivial courtesies for each other, so apt to be neglected in the monotony of daily intercourse.

Strike and stab each other by sharp words and sarcasm they might, but it was always as lady and gentleman.

Barbara never lacked a cavalier servant when her brother was near her; nor did Jasper feel the need of the feminine attention that his sister could so gracefully bestow.

She turned to meet him this morning. There was a drawn, haggard look in her face that did not escape his eye. Perhaps fellow-suffering had made it more sympathetic, if not more keen.

"You are waiting for me. It was kind of you, sister mine. I suppose all the rest have finished and gone?"

"Yes, they have gone," she answered, slowly. "He asked her to ride with him, this morning, as it would be his last day at Vernon. I suppose you understand what that means?"

"In the light of the confidence bestowed on me, last night, it is not very difficult to guess," he answered, drily.

"Oh, yes, it was all talked over at the breakfast-table this morning, quite openly. We were *en famille*, you know—uncle and myself, and the happy pair. Uncle was quite delighted—in fact, we were all in a state of indescribable satisfaction with ourselves and everybody else."

And she laughed—a low, mocking laugh that made her brother flinch upon her: a gaze almost tender in its own sympathy.

"And you, Bab?"—it was very seldom he gave her her childhood's name—"you had to bear it all."

His tone was full of pitying significance, but she only laughed again—bitterly, harshly.

"I had to bear it all, of course," she repeated.

"It was a little overpowering. New wine and new love are apt to fly to the head, and Gerald was painfully absurd, and she as painfully insane. It was all settled with a rapidity by my old-fashioned notions quite unmaidenly. They are to be married at Christmas."

"At Christmas!" repeated Jasper, drawing a long breath. "At Christmas! Ah, well, six months is six months! Who can prophesy how love's course may run for half a year!"

"What do you mean?" she said, looking up in his face with a startled expression.

The cold eye that met hers had the blue glint of steel.

"I mean that delays are dangerous," he answered, tersely. "I mean that if I were Gerald Fairfax I would marry Mildred Vane to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" she repeated, breathlessly, still looking into his face; "and why?"

"Because," and an icy smile flitted over his face, though the eyes never changed their steady gaze—"because you and I need only time and thought to prevent his marrying her at all. Come into the conservatory, we will talk it over."

"You and I," she whispered—"you and I! Brother!"—she laid her hand on his arm, while the colour went and came on her face in strange flushes—"what is this marriage to you?"

"So much," he answered—and the words seemed breathed through his set teeth—"so much that I would peril all that I have—all that I am—all that I ever hope to be—to prevent it!"

"Then you, too, love her?"

The question was one of wonder, of pain, almost of contempt.

"I love her," he answered, slowly—"yes, I love her, even as you—love—*him*."

She turned from him to the window. There was a moment's silence. Cold and relentless as she might be she was woman still, and this rending of the veil from her heart was pain—cruel pain.

"I know it," continued her brother. "I have known it long. Bab, we come of strange, wild blood. You know the old story of our gipsy grandmother. Our grandfather, then a young officer, wearing his first epaulets, won the gipsy maiden's heart. Older and wiser heads interfered to prevent the unequal match. The maiden was sent back to her people, the young lover quartered at another and more distant post. It was one of our nursery legends, how the beautiful gipsy girl found her way through leagues of snow and ice, over white-capped mountains, and storm-swept valleys, until she stood again at her lover's side. They were married, and we know the marriage was a strangely happy one.

"But if he had proven false," some one once asked the heroine, when her hair was blanched with age. "If after that long, terrible journey into a strange land you had found your lover forgetful of his vows?"

"I should have killed him," she answered, quietly. "I had the arrow hidden in my breast. My people told me the house-dweller was ever false. But with the daughter of the Romany, it was either love or death."

"When did you turn demon?" asked Barbara, facing her brother suddenly, with white lips and dilating eyes. "When did you learn to wake despair into madness? There was no vow, no pledge, between us. He never cared for me, and you know it. And yet—yet I would give my last drop of blood to win him from her—to know, even in death, he was mine."

"You would do this, you say?" Jasper Vernon spoke slowly and reflectively. "Then our stakes are equal. Bab, life is all a game men and women must play as best they can. The cards are against us, but we may win even yet. Shall we try?"

"Try?" she whispered, breathlessly. "What can we do? It is too late."

"They are to be married at Christmas. It is not too late. If we work together, with heart and soul, and strength and will, Bab, this marriage need never be. We don't need arrows or daggers now-a-days. There are weapons as potent, if less deadly, with which men battle and conquer—aye, and woman, too, Bab."

"Hush! hush!" she whispered, with a shudder. "Jasper, you frighten me; your voice is so strange, your eye so cold."

"I frighten you?" he echoed, with a bitter laugh—"I frighten *you*, Bab?"

"Yes," she answered, trembling still. "I don't know why, but a chill comes over me when you speak. It seems as if—as if there were some evil presence near."

"Perhaps there is," he answered, with a dark smile. "If so, I at least do not fear it. There are no worse demons than those that dwell in human hearts like yours and mine. Bab, look up at me; give me your hand. Will you give up your life's hope without a struggle, or shall we strive together?"

"Against fate?" she asked, hopelessly.

"Aye, against fate," he answered. "Fate has been conquered ere now. All things are possible to the man who wills and the woman who loves. Bab, we can prevent this marriage if we try. Shall we try?"

"Yes," she answered; and their cold hands tightened in a clasp that was like the grip of those drowning in the same dark sea. "Brother, we will try."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MORNING LIGHT.

ALL unconscious of the dark compact made against them, all unconscious of any evil

shadow haunting their path, the lovers rode on together through the dewy sweetness of the summer morning, whose beautiful promise seemed a type of their own fair, opening lives.

Milly's heart was too full for words. It seemed as if the bright cloud-land in which she dwelt was opening into a vista whose radiance dazzled her—as if all her hopes, and fears, and bewildering fancies had been steadied for ever into one great sun of certainty, whose glorious light would irradiate her life henceforth with unchanging beam.

Gerald loved her—she was to be his wife. The strong hand that had guided her through the Valley of Death would clasp her own for ever; the true heart of her faithful friend was her own for aye; the kind voice, that she had heard when all other sounds of earth were but broken echoes, would guide, direct, cheer her, until life was past. It was so strange, so sweet, this blessed certainty—this surety of repose.

All night long she had lain awake, her eyes fixed on the starlit heavens, that had never seemed so near and so bright. Such a hush had come over her troubled heart, it was as if she had turned from a crowded, bewildering city into some sanctuary, where all was stillness, and safety, and peace.

And the bright flush of the morning had only added to the fullness of her joy. Sir Charles had been so kind and so tender—Gerald seemed almost as dear to him as a son.

The breakfast was a feast of congratulation; and now they were riding out together through a world fair as the Eden first bestowed on man—an Eden that seemed without a shadow of sorrow or sin.

Ah, if they had guessed that the trail of the serpent was already in its flowers, and the flaming sword of the avenging angel already gleaming at its gates!

"You are wonderfully quiet, darling," Gerald let the reins drop loosely on Warrior's neck, as they reached a long stretch of forest-road where the horses' feet fell noiselessly on the soft sward, and the trees interlaced their branches in Gothic arches overhead. "Here I have been rattling on for the past half-hour about myself and my affairs, and I have scarcely heard two words from you. I begin to think I have won that miracle of her sex—the woman who does not talk; and yet I would not like that, either. I will be a very exacting lover, I am afraid; for I want to hear your voice, and share your thoughts, and read every emotion of your heart. What are you thinking of now?"

"What am I thinking of?" she repeated, as Black Eagle fell into pace with her more martial companion. "I scarcely know. It seems as if I were too happy to think."

"Too happy!" he laughed, joyously. "Well, that is too charming an explanation for me to object to on the score of its logic. You are really happy, my pet—perfectly and unquestionably happy?"

"So happy," she answered, in a low, musical voice, "that it seems as if life could give me nothing more."

"Life is more generous than you think. It has still untold stores of love, and joy, and happiness for us, darling. The beautiful future is just opening for us. It is because the past has been so dark to you that the present seems so bright."

"The past so dark?" she repeated, with a shudder. "Yes, it seems a night into which I cannot see. Will it ever be clearer to me? Sometimes I feel as if the mists were breaking, and I could see beyond. Then they close, and all is darkness."

His own face shaded. This strange, forgotten past was the one cloud upon the sunshine of his happiness.

What did it hide? What spectres might be lurking within its impenetrable shadows? What threatening whispers sounded in its fathomless depths—that dark, lost past, that had all the mysterious terrors of the unknown.

But he would not think of it to-day; its shadow should not fall on the first roseate flush of Love's morning; he would only look

in the beautiful face of his darling and read in her clear eyes love's lesson of hope and trust.

"We will not talk about it—nay, we will not think about the past to-day. Let it go, dear, like the troubled dream it seems. In the glory of the morning we will give no thought to the phantoms of the night."

"But will it ever come back to me?" she asked in a low, troubled tone. "I know that I am not as others. I know there is something I have lost—something after which I seem grasping in vain."

"You have lost memory, dear," he said, gently, feeling that a few plain words would be wisest and best. "All your life before your illness has become a blank to you. The same thing has happened to others. A violent attack of brain fever often leaves some of the mental powers temporarily impaired."

She lifted her eyes to his with the old trust and confidence. There was no shadow so dark, so bewildering, through which that kind, clear tone could not guide her.

Alas, she did not know there was a darkness in which its music would lead her astray!

"And will it ever come back to me," she asked, "this memory, this past I have lost?"

"It may," he answered, gravely. "I cannot tell. Sometimes it returns slowly, gradually. Again, a sudden shock, a blow, a fall, may restore it at once, as if by a lightning flash. But we have given time and thought enough to a painful subject. What have we to do with the past to-day? It is to the future we must look, bright with the rainbow hues of love and hope—the future we are to pass together,—together!"

He laid his hand upon her rein, and Black Eagle stopped obediently under the shadow of a huge, overarching oak.

"Together!" he repeated. "Darling, look! This is the spot where, since my boyhood, I have dreamed of raising that fairest of earth's temples—a home! This land, these wild, wooded hills, were my sole inheritance. All else was swept away from my father by a reverse of fortune. This tract of ground—Royston Chase, as it is called—was only saved by the protection of an entail. It was one of the delights of my boyhood to come here under the shadow of this old oak and dream of the home I would build here when I grew to be a man. My air-castle changed its style and shape at least a score of times as the years went by. Sometimes it was a feudal fortress, with tower and buttress, like those that charmed me in the chivalrous romances I loved to read. Again, it was to be a pavilion, light and airy as those pictured in Moorish tales, with fountains playing, and flowers blooming, and wide, marble corridors, lit by coloured lamps. Again, as my taste matured a little, I had visions of a stately pile of solid masonry, with all things rich, and luxurious, and beautiful within its walls—a spacious mansion, whose wide doors should stand hospitably open to welcome the wise, and witty, and charming guests who would gather in its gay saloons. But my dream-picture has changed again. Shall I tell you what it is now?"

"Yes," she answered, softly, her eyes drooping beneath his smiling gaze. "What is it now?"

He glanced around him ere he spoke. The scene had never looked so bright and beautiful as it did to-day.

The great oak under which they had paused stood alone in the midst of a grassy glade.

Behind them rose a line of hills, wild, rugged, and picturesque; before them the land sloped gently down, in wooded curves, to the sea.

They could see the blue waves shimmering under the golden light of the summer sun; they could hear the solemn monotone of the billows breaking on the beach.

It was a scene and an hour for love's young dream, and Gerald's voice was rich with the heart's music in which such dreams find speech.

"I see a home," he said, "neither castle,

nor palace, nor stately mansion, but a bright, airy, wide-roomed cottage, with windows opening to the breeze, and the sunshine and flowers clambering up the trellised walls, and birds nestling fearlessly in the spreading branches of this old oak, that shall stand beside its door. There will be neither state nor splendour within, but ease, and comfort, and happy freedom; and though guests may come and guests may go, it will be not for guests that the rooms are decked and the board is spread, and all things made fair, and bright, and sweet. For that home is to be the palace of my queen. I can see her moving through the rooms with quiet, womanly touch, at which disorder and confusion vanish. I can see her bending over the flowers, that seem to blossom into brighter beauty in the sunshine of her smile. I can see her standing on the porch in the gathering twilight, watching for my coming—my beacon light, however dark and clouded my pathway—my beautiful Evening Star, I see her," and his tone trembled with its depth of tenderness—"the queen of my home, the light of my eyes, the one love of my heart—my own true wife!"

His hand clasped hers; there was a moment's silence—a silence too sweet for words.

"And I can be all this to you?" she whispered, timidly. "I—even I?"

"All this," he repeated—"all this. Aye, and a thousand-fold more. Milly! Milly! you do not guess one-half your power; you do not dream of the sceptre you hold in those little hands. It is my heart you have won, child—my heart—not the passing fancy that is all that some men ever give even to the women they make their wives. You have won my heart; you can wound or heal, blight or bless it, as you will. If I should lose you now—now that I have known the blessedness of hope—if I should find you false, or fickle, or unworthy—well, it would not kill me (men are made strong enough to bear such blows), but I think it would do worse. It would harden me into flint. I would be dead in heart—dead to hope, to happiness, to love, for ever—"

"Oh, hush! hush!" she murmured, tremulously. "Do not speak of what is more terrible to me than death itself. I would rather die than lose you, Gerald—rather die!" "My darling! my darling!" he said, remorsefully; for her face had paled, her lips were quivering like those of a grieved child. "I should not have pained you with such hard, cruel words. Forget them, my love—my innocent love; they are folly as applied to you or to me. Give me your hand, and here beneath this old oak, that, God willing, is to be our roof-tree, let us promise to love and trust each other, whatever betide—let us take the same heart-vow that ere long we shall speak before the altar—to be faithful for ever, through joy and sorrow, through strength and weakness, through storm or sunshine, until death do us part."

"Until death do us part!" The words had scarce passed his lips when a shriek of terror burst from hers.

A gaunt, herculean figure had started out of the thicket behind them—a wild-looking, half-oid man, whom Gerald recognized at a glance.

It was the desperado who had confronted them at the Vultures on the previous day—the outcast who seemed hiding from the face of his fellow-man.

But he had no time to think or wonder now, for with a snarl of terror Black Eagle had flung up her head and sprang madly down the hill!

(To be continued.)

WHEN among your superiors preserve silence; you may learn something; when among those below you, also preserve silence that you may escape the shafts of envy; but, should you be forced to speak, be brief, dignified and modest, and you may not only disarm envy, but make friends.

STRAYED AWAY;

A STORY OF A LOVE.

CHAPTER XLVI.

STILL CONFIDING.

BEFORE the two gentlemen went to the drawing-room Arthur had prevailed upon Mr. Millard not to tell Adelaide the whole of Percy's treachery. He had heard that she had a religious sense of duty, and would abide by her father's decision.

"Tell her kindly that you have unmistakable proofs of his unworthiness," said Arthur; "but do not tell her the entire truth. She would feel it too keenly; her very soul would revolt from him; every delicate instinct of her nature would be outraged, and I should fear the consequences of the reaction on herself."

"Yes, you are right," said Millard; "it is best to tell her simply that she must forget him—a thing easy enough to tell a girl, but very hard for a girl to do; but Adelaide is proud, and will value the fellow at his worth."

They went to the drawing-room, and both were calm. The anxious glance Adelaide flashed upon their faces read nothing to verify her misgiving, and she returned to her piano. She had just finished the first verse of a favourite song of Percy's, and began the second.

"Play something else, my love," said Millard. "You have plenty of prettier music."

The exceptional kindness of his tone brought the old misgiving back again, and her fingers trembled on the keys.

"What shall I play, papa, dear?"

"I do not know what music Mr. Wilson prefers."

"The simplest," said Arthur, in answer to Adela's look of inquiry. "Do you know 'Auld Robd Gray'?"

The bright head bowed an assent. Arthur went to her side, and assisted her to find the song. She could sing to him with pleasure now, since she felt that he had not injured her Percy.

"You are like papa," she said, with a smile that reminded him of Fanny more and more. "He is fond of those quaint old ditties. He especially delights in 'John Anderson, my Jo,' and I do detest singing it."

"I like the old song, too."

Singularly enough, Fanny had sung it to Arthur and his mother many a time when they had their happy days in Paxton-street, and so here was another link between Fanny and Miss Millard. Arthur's liking for her began to increase.

She sang "Auld Robin Gray" with all its plaintive pathos, and then others followed; then they gave a duet. Arthur had a rich and mellow baritone voice of peculiar power and sweetness, and it blended well with Adelaide's in a melody from "La Favorita." The junior Millards left the billiard-table, and stole in quietly to hear the music.

Millard senior watched them with pleasure. They were evidently taking a liking to each other. They sang together with perfect harmony, and if there had been no sympathy between them, they could not have done that.

It began to rain heavily before Arthur rose to depart; and then it was found that there would be no train for an hour. Arthur seemed troubled at that. He did not see how he could get home, and he knew his mother would be anxious.

"If it is important that you return to-night," said Mr. Millard, seeing the troubled look, "my brougham is at your service; otherwise, you had better stay, and we will have a rubber at whist."

Arthur's good nature fought with his inclination. He thought of the coachman and the horse when he contemplated the long journey in the wet at a late hour of the night, and he was sure that his mother, with the natural good sense that made her admirable, would infer that he had stayed at Penge.

The rain fell heavier, and there was a storm. The rain fell after the storm went down, and there was no promise of cessation, so Arthur accepted the friendly invite. He liked the household better as he became acquainted with it. Even the junior Millards were tempered in tone and feeling as the hours wore on in the quiet of home, and the outside world was shut out by curtain and door.

When Adelaide retired for the night her father followed her, as she feared he would. The slight cloud upon him—the restraint perceptible only to the delicate instinct of her love warned her that the peril to Percy was not over yet; and though she was conscious of her father's purpose in rising when he did, she tried to hurry into her room to escape from him, lest she should hear anything against Percy.

But Millard called her to him.

"Adela!"

"Papa, dear!"

"Come here a moment."

She went. It was not his habit to do more than kiss the soft cheek put up for his kiss at the good-night, but now, outside her chamber, he put his arm round her and kissed her twice very tenderly.

"I have bad news to tell you, my child, but you will bear it bravely. It is almost what I feared."

It was what she had feared, too; and she shivered while her heart clung to Percy Falkland. Had he not told her everything, and this was but the substance of the shadow.

"What is it, papa?"

"You must think no more of Mr. Falkland. Don't tremble, pet. You must forget him. I will not, for your sake, say hard words of him."

"Don't, please. I think I know."

"No, my darling, you don't know; and I need say no more than that I have good reason to say this. You are sure I should not speak without good reason."

"Quite sure," and she shivered again. Then asked, with some slight bitterness, "Who has told you?"

"Mr. Wilson. And believe me, Adela, he is a gentleman to whom we owe our deepest gratitude, for he has saved you from much misery."

Her eyes filled with tears. She drooped her head, and went into her room. And what wonder if the poor girl felt angry with Arthur for having spoken ill of Percy, when she felt that whatever Percy had done she could forgive him. So she thought in her innocence—never thinking that his crime was so grave.

"Forget him," said her father at the last.

"Promise me, Adela."

"Yes, papa, I will."

And they parted so. Adela threw herself upon the bed and wept. It might be true that Mr. Wilson had saved her from much misery; but then in the saving he had caused her more. And why should she believe them, when Percy's handsome face, full of despairing love, as she had last seen it, haunted her, and she remembered his last words—"You will come to me?"

In the solitude of her chamber Adelaide made a rash resolve. She would go to him, and see him once more; ask him to tell her what was the dreadful thing that threatened to separate them. It would be easy to steal away in the morning. She could make a pretext of going to see a lady friend in the neighbourhood—take the train for London—see Percy, and return in two hours or so.

And with that resolve she went to sleep—the thought of Percy in her soul, while the evening prayer was on her tongue. And the man, whose image interrupted her pure prayer, was then in the heat of a fierce orgie, drinking hard with dissolute acquaintances, and talking in a way that would have made her shudder had she heard him.

Sleep did not come to her that night. She rose early, still full of her intent, and dressed herself for the journey, leaving nothing to put on but her mantle and bonnet. Ade-

laide was in the habit of making morning calls, so her parents were not surprised to see her attired, or to hear that she was going out.

Percy's letter—the one that he had written, imploring her to come to him—was in her hand, and she was in the breakfast-room alone, reading it, when Arthur Wilson entered. He saw by the glance she gave him, the involuntary shrinking, that she knew whom she had to thank for her father's resolve that Percy must be forgotten.

Arthur Wilson never liked to rest under a false impression; and he already experienced so sincere a regard for Adela, that it pained him to see her shrink away. He approached her.

"Believe me," he said, with grave tenderness, "I was deeply pained to have to be the bearer of ill tidings, but I could not bear to let the sacrifice be made. I know I have incurred your displeasure—your dislike; but you will forgive me later, when you know my motive and me."

"Why did you come?" she said, indignant in her sorrow. "They need never have known."

In the next moment she was sorrow. The pale and noble countenance bent over her impressed her with the idea that there was something in Percy's conduct graver than she knew. His words impressed her still more.

"I came to save you, Miss Millard," he said sadly; "and sorry as I am to find that you shrink from me, I feel that I have done my duty."

"But you speak ill of Percy."

"Not ill—only the truth. I told the whole story and did my best to extenuate him."

"Did you? I am glad you did that," and Miss Millard took Arthur's hand gratefully. She began to understand him now. "I am sure, if you told only the simple truth they will pity more than blame him. Don't you think so?"

CHAPTER XLVII.

MEN AS THEY ARE.

ARTHUR did not reply immediately to that inquiry. He could not meet the wistful gaze and quench the pleasure in its expectancy by telling the truth.

"Mr. Falkland is to be pitied, in a measure," he said, at length, "as he was, to some extent, the victim of a misapprehension. Beyond this, my dear Miss Millard, you had better not question me."

"Has he done anything so very serious, then?"

"It is his duty to give you a full explanation, and you had better be satisfied with what your father says. He is the best judge of what to tell you, and what to conceal."

Miss Millard bowed to that gravely spoken counsel. She was impressed with the belief that Arthur had come with the purest motive, but she was still inclined to measure Percy's faults with the lenience of love, no matter what his faults might be.

"This gentleman would be very strict even with the slightest fault," she thought; "and perhaps Percy has done something that men like papa and Mr. Wilson condemn—but it may not be very dreadful, after all."

And thinking so, she would have carried her project into execution—gone to London that morning—had not Mrs. Millard chosen that day for a visit to the Crystal Palace, and requested Adela's company. It saved her from danger for a day, at least, and gave her time to reflect.

Arthur went to town with Mr. Millard. The speculating stockjobber sustained his cordiality of tone, and invited Wilson down to a second little dinner for the following day. He reasoned sagely enough that the best way to teach Adela to forget Percy was to keep her attention diverted, and there could be no better diversion than the society of a young and handsome gentleman.

"The more Adela thinks of Wilson, the less she will think of that wretched fellow," said Millard to himself; "and it will not be a bad thing for me to be well in with a responsible man in such a house as Wilson is in."

In his solicitude for his daughter Millard did not forget himself. With Arthur Wilson for a son-in-law, he felt that he would have a useful aid in the arranging of certain financial matters that hedged him in at times.

"Falkland is a thorough rascal," he said, as they rode up, "and I am afraid there are too many like him."

"Yes," assented Arthur; "I am afraid he is the average man of the day, and it is an age that gives us petty profligates in youth and cynics in early manhood. Pure sentiment is sneered down, good morality laughed out of fashion. One of the worst signs of the times is that men have faith in their own virtue, and when they yield to temptation lay the fault to human nature."

"In what do you think does the cause of this exist?"

"It is so difficult to say. The son is a reflex of the father, and the sons hear the fathers talking of early days, that have not been too respectable or pure. Take the tone of society in general, and see what it is. Get together a company of men of all ages, and listen to their conversation. Should it turn upon religion, it is in doubt of religion; and should it be of female purity, it is in doubt of female purity. Each man believes his own wife and daughters to be above suspicion, and yet he speaks of the world of women in general as a world in which honour is a principle sustained by fear, and not by instinctive virtue. At home he condemns the vices that abroad he falls into."

"There is some truth in that, Mr. Wilson."

"Too much, Mr. Millard. If men carried the spirit of their belief home to themselves they would doubt the mothers who gave them birth—the children who love them. They say the age is vicious, accept it as a fact, and then help to strengthen the fact by choosing rather to drift with the tide of vice than attempt to stem the torrent. The respectable middle age of the period is very frequently but a mask over the sinful memories of youth."

"And you blame the men entirely."

"Entirely, and without reserve. For a man to say that a woman tempted him is to imitate the ferocious cowardice of the wolf to whom the lamb is a passive sacrifice. In the passionate innocence of youth a girl may need to be saved even from herself, and then it is man's duty to be the protector—not the destroyer."

"You have lived a good life, Mr. Wilson."

"I trust so. Love for my mother made me reverence her sex. In an ordinary company of men I could not admit that simple truth without being laughed at in derision."

Mr. Millard thought of his sons and sighed. He asked himself whether he had done his duty by them. He had been accustomed to be content with the idea that they were no worse than others; and being no worse than others, they were going rapidly on the road that would make their respectable middle age a mere mask for the sinful follies of youth. They shared the laxity of moral feeling that was degradation to manhood and an insult to the gentler sex.

"It is the custom to shirk these truths," said Arthur, while Millard was thinking seriously; "deny their existence tacitly, taboo them as forbidden subjects, and we suffer for the hypocrisy when the evil comes direct home to our door."

"But where is the remedy?"

"With mankind. Let men live purely, and the world must be pure."

"I fear the remedy is Utopian," said Mr. Millard. "Men are not saints."

"They need not be. Let them be only just to women and honest to each other—let them simply do their duty."

"I fear, Mr. Wilson, we shall not make the world better by individual reform."

"Individual reform is precisely what we

require. The man who waits for the world to reform does not assist its reformation."

"Our social system is undoubtedly defective," said Mr. Millard. "See, in my own case. There is no punishment for the scoundrel who came into my house and won my daughter's love. Had he married her we could have punished him for bigamy; but what restitution would there be for me? If I caught a common thief prowling about my premises I could punish him for the intent to steal. This man trifles with my child—steals her affection, and perhaps breaks her heart, and because the crime is not fully carried out he escapes."

The train stopped as Millard ended that comment on our social ethics, and the two gentlemen parted outside the station.

"To-morrow at five," said Millard, "and bring Mrs. Wilson with you. The lady who has trained you into what you are is very welcome in my house."

Arthur sent a messenger from the bank to Paxton-street with a brief note apprising Mrs. Wilson of his safety, and the cause of his absence. He would not let her endure an hour's unnecessary anxiety.

The widow heard the account of his visit at tea-time, and she did not fail to notice the unconscious interest with which he spoke of Adela. Since he had been instrumental in saving Miss Millard, his attention was not so entirely devoted to Fanny—not that his regard lessened. Arthur's affection and friendship were alike faithful.

"You will like Miss Millard," he said; "she resembles Frances in many things. There is the same gentle faith of nature—the same tenderness of tone. How is it, mother, that bad men are loved the best?"

"They are not loved the best," was the reply. "It is that a woman's love is tested more by them, and the powerful strength of its devotion is brought out. A good man is priceless to a woman's heart; her fervent faith for him is greater, though its fervour is unspoken. We cling to bad men with the strength of pain; to the good with the power of pleasure. It is not that we are less fond of good, but we are more happy, and our happiness is quieter."

Arthur thanked her for the explanation. Even he had begun to feel some envy of the selfish fellow who was loved so well by two true and noble women.

"Yet," he said, "it does seem strange."

"Not so, Arthur. The cause is simple. If I had a second son, and he were like Mr. Falkland, I might seem more fond of him, because I should be more demonstrative in the hope of winning him back to redemption; but I could not care for him as I do for you—with a love that is full of perfect peace—with a love that never knew a pang."

"Always right, my mother," he said, kissing her with something of the old gladness. Then he sighed. "Have you invited Frances to come and see us?"

"No, Arthur."

"Will you?"

"Not yet. When she comes it must be with her husband."

"And do you think that will ever be?"

"I hope so, and believe so—when the fiery crucible of suffering has tried and proved them both."

"And Frances has suffered," he said, sadly.

"Poor girl!"

"You love her still."

"I always shall; simply and purely, as I always have. If a man can feel pure friendship for a man, surely he can feel a truer and gentler friendship for a girl. Women are given to us to love, and cherish, and protect. The man who cannot do so purely is a breaker of his trust—something less than human—in no part divine. To say that I cannot love Frances with purity is to class me with the boyish cynic or the battered world-worn rascal."

"And there are too many such."

"Too many; but the world is not quite full of them. The true chivalrous spirit of manhood

will never die, however much the vice and vanity of the age may beset it."

"If there were more men like you, my son!"

"There are. The trace of Eden is never quite stamped out. There is no man who cannot be redeemed if a woman takes the trouble to redeem him."

"Mr. Falkland?"

"Even he. The end is not come yet; Frances will be happy; her patient faith cannot go for ever unrequited."

CHAPTER XLVII.

OUT OF WORK.

MR. FALKLAND the elder was seriously inconvenienced and as seriously troubled by Percy's absence. He heard of Percy now and then, but he heard no good of him. The young man was living a life of feverish dissipation, drowning disappointment and good sense together.

The builder had to send an engineer in Percy's place to finish the railway contract in Germany, and he lost considerably by it. He lost prestige by Percy's breach of faith; and other contracts that would have fallen to him were given elsewhere.

"And it is all through the West people," said the builder, savagely. "Percy's prospects are ruined for ever, and he may never return again."

When he found that there was no possibility of severing the tie between Fanny and his son, the builder took a dislike to all her family. He was barely civil to old Bill West, and the boy who was in the yard with him he never deigned to notice.

It troubled the carpenter. He was a workman of the old school, and stood in awe of his master. Trades' unions and co-operation were in their infancy then, and the masters had it nearly all their own way. Old Bill had been brought up to believe that labour was the only right of labour, and that it was his duty to take what he could get and be thankful.

The simple-hearted man felt that it was he who had wronged the Falklands rather than that the Falklands had wronged him. He did not know his power. Fanny still concealed the truth. When West saw Falkland looking at him, as he would look at times in moody anger, the carpenter would think,—

"It's that sixty pound a year he don't like, and we don't want it. I daresay he pays it with a grudge."

But it was worse even than that, as was proved one Saturday morning, when Falkland called West into the counting-house. West was inspired with the conviction that something unpleasant was about to happen.

"West," said Falkland, in the tone of a man who had made up his mind to do what his conscience told him was an injustice, "you have been a long time in my employment."

"Yes, sir; four-and-thirty years—going on for five-and-thirty."

"And you have always served me well. I am sorry to have to part with you, West, but I find it unpleasant to have you here. Here is a fortnight's money for you, and a fortnight's for your son James. Your services will not be required after to-day."

"No, sir—just so, sir," said poor old Bill, nearly stunned by the shock. "I daresay it can't be pleasant to look at me when you think of what's happened. But then, you see, sir, I've a large family, and after being four-and-thirty years in one situation, it's hard to get another. 'Tain't been pleasant for me, being here; but I've had to stand it for the sake of those at home."

"We will not discuss the matter, West. You are a good workman, and at this season of the year there is plenty of work to be had. I suppose you know the whole truth by this time. Your daughter has been my son's ruin, caused him to leave me in anger, and he is going to the bad for a misplaced affection."

"I thought all along it was t'other way," said Mr. West, simply; "but people have such different ways of looking at things."

"You have my best wishes," the builder went on, not choosing to notice the remark; "and little as your daughter deserves such kindness, the allowance will be continued."

"It was wrong of her to go from home," said West, inferring that Falkland was blaming Fanny for her supposed weakness; "but, then, she was very fond of Master Percy. He was a baby in his cradle in this old house here in the yard when I first saw him, and I never thought he would bring me to sorrow; but I have forgiven him, so has Fanny—so there's an end of that."

The builder was puzzled. Was it possible, he asked himself, that West was still in ignorance of the marriage?

"I had better not inquire," he reflected. "If he is, he had better remain so."

"You will distinctly understand," Falkland said, in conclusion, "that all future intercourse between your daughter and my son is forbidden. Should he ever visit or acknowledge her without my sanction the allowance will be withdrawn."

"We have had too much trouble to get her home to let her go again," said West. "Never you fear, sir. Keep Mr. Percy away from our place, and I'll keep my girl away from yours."

He put his own money in his pocket, carried James's in his hand, and returned to the yard. He shouldered his basket with a sigh.

"Come, Jim," he said to his son, now grown into a fine manly fellow, more advanced in education and independence than his father, "say good-bye to your mates. Here's your money."

"How's that, father?"

Several of the men heard what West said, and gathered round in wonder.

"Don't matter about the 'ow,' my boy; we're discharged—that's the whole of it."

James West crimsoned with indignation, and cast an angry glance at the counting-house. He partly suspected the cause of their dismissal, and he was old enough now to feel the wrong that had been done.

"Well, that is hard!" exclaimed one of the men—and he spoke the opinions of the rest. "After four-and-thirty years, too! Why you can do as good a day's work as you ever did!"

"Yes; but it's not that," said West, with emotion. "You can guess, mates, pretty near as well as I can tell you what it's for. People that have done wrong don't care to be kept in mind of it, specially if they can afford to keep it out of sight."

West had the sympathy of every man present, for the story of the workman's daughter and the master's son had leaked out, and Percy was held in no favour there.

James West and his father went home side by side, and neither spoke much. Jim did not care a jot for his discharge; he was a quick and clever artisan, and work was to be got in London just then; but he felt the injustice to his father.

"Falkland's had all the work out of the old man," he said to himself, "and now he's turned him out. It shall go hard if I don't manage to be even with them yet. They think I don't know much at home, and they think I don't take notice; but I know there's a score to settle up with Mr. Percy on Fanny's account, and I'll pay it if I ever get the chance."

Tea was ready in the pretty parlour in Camberwell when the carpenter and his son reached home. The younger children—healthier for the change of air, cleaner and neater for Fanny's presence—were at play in the garden. Young Bill was there, with yet half-an-hour to spare before he went to the fire-escape station. He was nursing Fanny's baby, and listening with wondering pleasure to Fanny's skill on the piano; for they had a piano—a good one, in its way—picked up at a sale for twelve pounds; and when properly tuned, repaired, and polished, it gave the parlour quite an air of grandeur.

Mr. West went into the back parlour to his wife, and found the little woman busy at the ironing-board, taking extra pains over the front of his best white shirt for Sunday. He put his arm, with its rough coat-sleeve round

her neck, and kissed her as he had never failed to do since the first day of their marriage.

"Well, father," said the little woman, cheerily. "I am a little late; but I'll be ready for tea by the time you've washed yourself and put your coat on."

"No hurry, mother."

The quiet sadness in his tone surprised her.

"Anything the matter, William?"

"Not much; only I shall have to look out for work."

"At this time of the year!"

Mrs. West knew, as well as her husband did, that it was the wrong season to be out of employment.

"Yes. It isn't that there's no work; but Falkland don't want me nor Jim any longer. You can tell why. But we needn't say a word to Fanny; it will only trouble her, and I fancy she is getting a little happier lately."

West was glad to see that his faithful partner bore the new trouble so bravely. The face, slightly worn with care, and calm with that patient, contented quietude so often seen upon the face of a steady poor man's wife, was downcast for a moment, and then she said,—

"Well, father, I daresay we shall get on just as well—we have a little money by, and the boys are all in place—even if you are out for a month or so. A rest will do you good. We are better off than many people."

It lifted a great load from West's mind to have the trouble met in that way. His wife was a help-mate in the proper sense of the word—a cheerful, industrious little woman, who rarely complained, and never met troubles half way.

"Yes," he said, again, "we are better off than most people, mother. If I can stick to work ten years longer, we shall not have to come to the parish for help. We've got good boys, for one thing; and we shouldn't be quite a burden to them, for another. But it's hard of Falkland."

"Why did he do it?"

"He didn't like to see me there; that's what it was. It made him feel ashamed of Master Percy, seeing me there; and I think there's been a quarrel between them about Fanny. But we must not tell her so."

The carpenter did not tell his wife all he feared. He knew, by what he had seen of others, how hard it was for a man of his years to get work when so many young and able hands were in the market. After four-and-thirty years of faithful service he had naturally looked forward to remaining at Falkland's yard to the end of his working days, and he had built up a pleasant prospect for his future.

He had married young, and his children had grown up round him while he was yet able to help himself. Three of them—young Bill, James, and Bob—were earning good wages, and the fourth—Andy—had been promoted from shop-boy to light porter at the tailor's where he worked. Fanny was provided for, and they had rather more than three hundred pounds laid by in the savings-bank. Then West was an old-established member of a sick fund and friendly society, and now that the expenses of bringing up a family were over, he looked forward to making a tolerable addition to his savings in the next ten years.

That was reckoning that he could work till he was sixty years old. He was quite content if he could pass the rest of his days in peace, have his pipe in the chimney corner, and see his grandchildren grow up round him.

But the unexpected dismissal from Falkland's overthrew his plans. He had looked upon his situation there as a certainty.

"If it comes to the worst," he said, "and I find that the masters think me too old, I can put a board in front of the house, and take jobbing carpentering. We've got our children round us, mother, and Fanny is with us once more."

There was peace in that small household, and the rich man in his villa at Penge was less happy than the poor one in the Camberwell

cottage. Fanny thought her father looked tired, and told him so, but he answered,—

"No, my pet; but it's Saturday, and the weather's warm; and somehow I always do feel more tired on Saturday than other days. I suppose it's because the week's work's done, and I feel that I can take a rest on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a blessing to poor men, if only for the rest it gives them."

CHAPTER XLIX.

ON THE BRINK.

They did not tell Fanny what had happened. She had seemed happier lately, and they would not let the shadow of their trouble mar the peace of mind that was apparently returning. In their simplicity the carpenter and his wife thought that their daughter was teaching herself to forget the man who had discarded her; but her quiet was the coming tranquillity grown of faith that in time Percy would return to her.

Unhappily, that tranquillity was destined to be short lived. The letter, written by Percy in his selfish anger after Mrs. Wilson's visit and the quarrel with his father, reached her early in the week. It was addressed to Miss West, and the address was in itself an insult, coming, as it did, from the man who had married her. But she recognized the familiar handwriting, and took it with a tremor from her little sister, who had run to answer the postman. The name on the envelope told Fanny how sternly Percy adhered to his determination of discarding her; but hope would cling, and she was not prepared for the cruel contents.

Her eyes swam as she read. Each deliberate word must have been intended to strike her with despair, for each word went to her soul.

"My love for you has been the bitter lesson of my life," she read—"my ruin. I could have endured everything had you been true. It is hard to think I have sacrificed parents, home, and kindred, wealth and position, for a woman who had not even the common virtue of faithfulness."

Though every word was full of intense bitterness, Fanny still read on.

"It is the keenest punishment of my folly that, no matter how far apart we may be, I am fettered to you by a tie that nothing but death can sever—a tie that will make me an outcast, and drag me down to misery. Think of it, and be happy if you can. I have no hope in the world."

Fanny read no more. She put her hand to her head and tried to think. Her thoughts were in a whirl—her eyes swam over the next few lines, and she took in their meaning indistinctly.

"I shall have left England before this reaches you, and you will never see or hear from me again."

He was going away, Fanny said to herself. He had quarrelled with his father, and was going away—an outcast, and through her. That was the meaning of his letter, and her full comprehension of its meaning broke from her in an anguished cry.

"He wants me out of the way. I have lived for Percy to wish me dead. He does not even mention baby."

Then she wept—the bitterest tears that she had ever wept; and no one heard a sound, or saw a sign of her sorrow. Her mother was downstairs, busy with the household work. The children were playing, and baby slept, smiling in his sleep, while Fanny buried her face in the pillow of her bed, and tried to sob away her heartache. She could not forget those terrible words—"I am fettered to you by a tie that nothing but death can sever—a tie that will make me an outcast, and drag me down to misery."

Fanny sobbed till she was exhausted, and then a tearless agony succeeded. She took her child from the cradle, and lay down with the little one folded in her arms—gazing at it with

her mournful eyes, pressing it to her as if the little life, with its infant love, could absorb her pain. It was hard to think the father of that pretty baby wished her dead.

The poor girl tried to sleep, but her brain seemed strangely troubled. Her thoughts grew incoherent, and the most striking scenes of her life were blended in a chaotic waking dream. She smiled with a weary recollection of joy at the remembrance of the happy day at Richmond, when Percy, with his handsome face full of adoring passion, talked tender sentiment to her, and knelt at her feet, grateful if he might only kiss her hand.

Then her happier days, when she was his young wife, and he taught her music; cultivated her mind, read tender poetry to her, and was more the lover since he had been the husband. She could scarcely associate him with the stern and fiercely angry man who confronted her with a tempest of bitter wrath in the shabby room in Maple-street.

"I have ruined him," she thought; "made him poor, and driven him from home, and he will never forgive me. I have been the bane of his life. I who loved him so!"

Then, in the midst of her despair an insidious whispering filled her soul, tempting her to make the sacrifice he seemed to desire. She slid from the bed, leaving her baby sleeping, opened her writing case, and, with her face whiter than stone, sat down to write.

Only a few sad words to her father and mother, asking them to pray for her and forgive her, and to take care of baby. "I know you will grieve for me," she wrote, "but I am so unhappy that I cannot live any longer. Mr. Falkland wants me out of the way, and he shall have his wish. May Heaven pardon him! Perhaps he will be kinder to our child when I am gone."

This she folded and placed on her dressing-table; then she put on her bonnet and mantle, and lingered, hesitating whether to take the child with her or not; but a merciful remembrance came to her. Old Bill West was so fond of the little fellow, that its loss would have broken him down. Had it not been for that remembrance Fanny would have taken the child out to die with her.

She went alone; left the agony of an age in the last kiss pressed on baby's lips, and stole down stairs quietly, so as not to disturb her mother. Fanny did not shut the street door, only drew it close, that it might not make a noise. She let her veil fall; it was early evening yet, and she was conscious that the passer-by would be startled by the pallor of her face if they saw it.

Mrs. West, going upstairs ten minutes later saw baby alone, and did not notice the note on the dressing-table. The little woman missed Fanny's bonnet and mantle from their accustomed places, and knew that Fanny had gone out then.

"Dearie me!" she said, going down stairs, "she has run out for something, and left the street door open; so she won't be long—she has not gone far."

Not very far. Fanny had taken one of the shortest roads to eternity. She went to Waterloo-bridge, and lingered there some time, but saw no chance of accomplishing her purpose. There were too many people about, and she shrank from the thought of being taken out of the water half drowned, and charged at the police-court with attempting to commit suicide. Even the fatally false self-abnegation that leads to death is robbed of its romance in these days.

The minutes grew into an hour, and still Fanny lingered, watching the sluggish waters lap into the slime on the banks, and heave sullenly against the arches of the bridge. Hers was not the frantic desperation that prompted a leap from the bridge—she wanted to die quietly.

At last she became conscious that a strangeness in her manner had attracted the attention of a policeman, and then she moved away—wandered about for hours—towards Islington, with the vague idea of looking once more at

the places pleasantly familiar to her in the Paxton-street days. Then back, towards Knightsbridge, with a thought that she might see Emily White, and speak a last word to her. Then, changing her mind, and returning to her purpose, back towards the river.

It was midnight when Fanny, tired of foot and weary-hearted, turned the corner of Parliament-street, the great bell in the clock tower was striking the hour, and the light was fading from the huge white dial. Fanny reached the foot of the bridge, and crept down the steps. She stood on the last one, with Percy's cruel letter crushed in her hand and feeling like lead.

She gazed at the sombre night sky, and her face was a mute prayer for forgiveness. She was faint and sick and weary, and could not speak. The sluggish tide rolled to her feet, and went back in sullen darkness, while she still lingered on the brink.

(To be continued.)

DIFFIDENCE OF GREAT MEN.

It may comfort some of our readers, troubled with an excess of modesty, to know that great men have been diffident in company and have broken down in attempting to speak.

The eloquent Robert Hall made an utter failure the first time he attempted to speak. The great Pitt was exceedingly shy in his private intercourse with men. Lord Clarendon was on terms of the greatest intimacy with him, and one day remarked, as Pitt was at his house,—

"My children have heard so much about you that they are anxious to have a glimpse of the great man. They are now at dinner. Will you oblige me by going in with me a moment?"

"Oh, pray don't!" said the orator, in great alarm. "What on earth would I say to them?"

"Give them the pleasure of seeing you at least," said his lordship, laughing, as he half led, half pushed him into the room.

The Prime Minister of England approached the little group. There he stood, looking alternately at the father and the children, and twirling his hat for a few minutes, without being able to utter a sentence.

When Daniel Webster was a school-boy, he tells us: "Many a piece did I commit to memory and rehearse it over and over again in my room, but when the day came, when the school collected, when my name was called, and I saw all eyes turned upon my seat, I could not raise myself from it."

Cowper's friends purchased him a place as clerk of the House of Lords, where his duties only required him to stand up and read parliamentary documents. The thought of standing up before such an audience was so terrible to him that as the time drew on, he was in agony of apprehension and tried to hang himself.

THE Naples coral harvest was very plentiful last year, although the quality was not very high, and over a million and a quarter pounds have been fished up, the Italian correspondent of the *American Register* tells us, worth about £200,000 in the rough state. There is a goodly quantity of the pale pink coral which is so highly valued by some countries, such as England, Germany, Russia, and the United States, but while fair beauties prefer this more delicate tint, pink coral is despised by their brunette sisters in Spain, India, and China, who favour the deep red hue. Italian coral is profitable property in one way—every tiny scrap can be utilised, and it is curious to notice that when the cargo is brought into port the dealers touch the broken ends of each branch with the tip of the tongue, wetting it to bring out the colour. This fishery is of immense importance to Naples, and last year 600 vessels and 5,766 men were employed from February to September dredging off the coasts of Sardinia, Corsica, and Sicily, off the mainland of Southern Italy, and on the Barbary coast.

THE WELCOME HOME.

FRANCE blew the wind from hill to hill,
The clouds were dark, the day was dead,
While under foot and overhead
There crept an ever-deepening chill.

As homeward bent, with toil and pain,
From life's fierce battle and the fires
That burn to ashes all desires,
I dragged once more the galling chain.

There shone the windows flower-drest
Of wealth; and there a single ray
From out the hovels by the way
The lesson of this life impressed—

How he that toils through storm and shine
Reaps less than he who merely waits—
Until the convoys at his gates
Unload their stores of bread and wine.

And sorrow-crowned and care-oppressed,
I wander while the gathering night
Quenches the last faint spark of life
That hope-like lingered in the West.

Is life worth living? At the door
This question meets me face to face—
The phantom dreams of life I trace—
The latch is raised, my doubts are o'er.

There comes a touch of dainty hands,
Soft lips smooth out the lines of care;
A sweetheart wife and boy are there
To welcome me to fairer lands.

W. A. T.

"IF ONLY."

CHAPTER XXXI.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

"Good Heavens," cried Frank Beverley, as the paper fell from his hands, "dead, so young, so frail, with all her sins on her head, gone to meet her Judge, and mine. I shall go mad, for I cannot but accuse myself of having contributed to her untimely fate."

After his mind had calmed down somewhat, he took a photograph of Vera from his pocket, and gazed at it long and earnestly, with eyes that refused to shed tears because they burnt with fever.

"And she was my wife," he murmured, "and came to me in the bloom of maidenhood, fresh and pure, and sweet as a rose; at least so I deemed her; my heart swelled with pleasure at having gained such a prize."

"Ah, me," he continued, with a bursting sigh; "it appears to me only as yesterday that she came tripping over the lawn at Sunnybank, her dainty figure robed in virgin white, with a rose nestling at her throat and in her golden hair, her face lit up with smiles as she caught sight of me; and then the rapturous kisses. Oh, Heavens, can such things be permitted, only to mock us with the dreams of past happiness. And now she lies cold and still, under the earth; she, who was once so lovely, and as good, as pure as an angel. Would to Heaven I had my hand on the throat of the man who tempted her to fall; he would quickly be lying as she is, nor would I feel that I had done society a wrong in ridding it of such a noxious reptile."

He paced the room in a state of great agitation, unsettled of purpose, but with a yearning to visit the spot where his supposed Vera rested, to shed, perhaps, tears over the grassy mound, and to mourn in silence over crushed hopes and blighted happiness, before he joined the brave band of heroes whose mission was not to slay, but to succour.

And he looked at her image again as if he wished to press his burning lips on that

face which smiled upon him even now, and seemed to bid him have hope, even though the fell destroyer, the reaper with the sharp sickle, whom men call death, had gathered her into the great harvest, from which no mortal is exempt.

"The lips which are stamped here by art were pure and unsullied. I can press them without aversion, even though they cannot respond to my caress. Oh, Vera! what have you not done, my lost darling; would to Heaven that I had died for you."

He kissed the portrait again and again, and then, throwing himself on a couch, sobbed as if his heart would break, and shed tears wrung from the anguish of his soul, until his frame quivered as if it were placed on the rack.

His mind was made up at last, and packing a few necessary things, and leaving a written message for his comrades, he crossed the Channel, only an hour before Vera's telegram arrived, *en route* for Nice.

It was a mere sentiment, this journeying to the supposed grave of Vera, but it did him honour, for it showed that he wished to pay respect to her memory by making this pilgrimage to a far-off country where his dead love, the once idol of his soul, lay buried.

He ate and drank mechanically, and looked at men, women, and nature, but he retained no recollection of faces or anything. He was like a man in a dream, like a storm-tossed vessel forging ahead through tempestuous seas to a given point, guided by a silent compass, which acted with unerring instinct.

How lovely nature seemed, all sunny smiles and cloudless skies when his destination was reached—a contrast to the inclement weather of England's sea-girt isle.

He almost dreaded a visit to the quiet cemetery, for something seemed to hold him back to mock him and his purpose, and he felt that this aim, like others, was unprofitable.

And Vera all this while—his Vera, penitent and living, breathing, palpitating, was yearning for reconciliation, while he was journeying afar to pay a last tribute, frail as he deemed her, to the memory of a dead past.

He discovered where her unknown double had been laid; and one evening, when the stars shone overhead and deep silence reigned around, he stood at the mound, which was planted with flowers whose sweetness scented the air, and wept, with no eye upon him but that of Heaven, where One reigns who neither slumbers nor sleeps.

"Adieu!" he cried, "farewell eternally. I go to face life, but I shall never forget how dear you were to me once; and my earnest prayer is that you are forgiven as freely as I forgive."

The call of duty was a point of honour with him now, and he resolutely set his face towards France, where desolating war had set its foot, and flames and smoke, and wailing widows and orphans proclaimed aloud the bitter fruits of man's insatiable ambition.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN SEARCH OF A HUSBAND.

VERA waited for news of her husband but none reached her, except that he was in France and alive, so far as the authorities knew at the time of writing.

"I, too, have a life to devote to the succour of the distressed, and will join him out there; perchance, we may meet, and amid the din and conflict of battle look into each other's eyes and see in them mutual forgiveness."

This thought enabled her to bear up under the suspense which at first threatened to undermine her health; and she was further consoled by receiving a loving letter from Violet, to whom she had sent her address, begging that her luggage should be sent on to Mrs. Joyce's.

Violet's letter ran as follows:—

"DEAREST VERA,—It seems an age since you left the Towers, and I hardly know how the

time has passed, except that I have been constantly attending our dear little Robin, who grows handsomer every day. I may tell you a secret that will surprise you—Robin is the son of Mr. Cotswold, and Edith was his wife and the niece of Mrs. Devereux, who, by the way, has left the Towers, and thank Heaven for all its mercies say I. Papa is far from well, and begs to be remembered to you; Mr. Honeywood was much grieved when he heard you had left, and your pensioners inquire after you whenever I visit them; so you see, dear Vera, that you are not forgotten, or ever will be by your loving friend,—VIOLET."

She shed many tears when she perused this message, and wished that she was near to console her with loving sympathy, and to cheer her father, whom she felt she had unintentionally wronged.

But she had higher aims even than these now, and resolved to be up and doing to fit herself for the duties she meant to undertake. Her first step was to write to the head of Lady Strangford's committee to offer her services as nurse, and to place herself under instruction.

In both cases she was successful, but before leaving England she journeyed down to Sunnybank to visit her aunt, whom she had too long neglected, and to whom she now wrote a loving letter, pouring out her whole heart to one who had been a mother to her in the best sense of the word.

As the train sped on its way past familiar objects Vera's spirits rose, for she seemed to be looking on the faces of old friends, who appeared to welcome her back to the happy home of her childhood.

How many bitter experiences had she not passed through since that day of her departure from Sunnybank, fresh in her bridal robes, and wedded to the man she had almost worshipped.

The lesson had taught her one thing—that self-reliance when wedded to duty is an inestimable quality, and one bound to win success; but when used to subvert and overthrow ties of kindred and wifely obligations, it cannot but react on the head of anyone using it, as it had on hers.

At last the dear old ivy-crowned church came in sight, like a beacon of hope, a haven of safety, and her mind conjured up many happy scenes, and that last one of all in which she had been one of the chief actors, when, whilst even standing at the altar, rebellious pride surged through her heart and brain, and divested the service of that joy and peace which it would have brought under different circumstances.

And now came dear old Sunnybank itself, with the snow gleaming on the roof and gables—a very picture of homely comfort and quaintness.

She drew her veil more closely over her face, not caring to be observed by the railway officials, to whom she was well known, or to be recognized by any chance acquaintance.

She walked along the country lane, now bare and bleak, its hedge-rows white and silvery with hoar-frost, past a rustic bridge over a streamlet whose waters were held bound by ice, and on to the gates, where she paused before entering, feeling that her conduct deserved bitter reproaches in not having taken counsel with her aunt before taking a step that had exposed her to temptations, and driven her husband out of England, perchance to die.

So great was the change in her heart that she did not even think now of the grave fault he had committed in throwing suspicion upon her on her bridal morn, but blamed herself entirely for all that had happened, and was prepared to endure, in a humble spirit, anything Mrs. Clevedon might see fit to say to her, even if uttered in anger.

There came a joyous tiny bark, and her pet, "King Coffee," rushed frantically up the drive and leaped upon her, endeavouring to caress her face, almost mad with delight at seeing her back again.

And, as if to greet her return, the sun gleamed brightly from behind its cloudy pillar,

and under its warmth the very trees and shrubs seemed to lift their heads; and to whisper mysterious words of welcome.

Brooker stood at the hall-door, looking at the figure that came up the walk, and then with a cry of joy rushed forward, and, throwing her arms around Vera's neck, fairly hugged her, uttering exclamations of delight, until Vera was fain to beg a truce.

Running back to the house Brooker exclaimed in her loudest tone:—

"Oh, ma'am, come down! Here's dear Miss Vera come back!"

There was a rustle of silk and descending footsteps, a quick yearning look of love, outstretched arms, and Vera was folded to the heart of the joyous matron, who uttered no word of reproach, but blessed her child, and thanked Heaven which had sent her back to her heart and home.

"Why, Vera," said a pleasant voice as she entered the cosy drawing-room, "how womanly you have grown! I hardly know you."

The speaker was Lady Hetty, who was delighted to embrace and welcome the truant, whose eyes were filled with glistening tears of happiness.

"But where's Frank?" Lady Hetty asked.

"I suppose he is coming later."

"I cannot answer for him," said Vera, with affected gaiety. "He was always wilful, you know, like all men."

What would she not have given to have answered differently, and to have entered leaning on his arm, a happy wife; but Heaven had seen fit to punish her, even by using her offense. Now, she would, he couldn't; and when he had been eager for reconciliation she humiliated him, and outraged his pride by dwelling amongst strangers where he could find her not.

Vera was glad to be alone with her aunt, for she had much to tell her, and to hear of in return.

"I do not wish to chide you, dearest," said Mrs. Clevedon; "but what I have endured no tongue can tell. I have lain awake at night trying to connect your disappearance with some episode in your past life, but failed; and then I would cry when I thought of you, so young and delicately nurtured, facing a stern world, perhaps ill and dying, when this home was open to you, to shield and protect even against a husband's cruelty."

"It was my fault, aunt. I was rash and resentful, and quitted him by stealth on our wedding-day, resolved that he should suffer, even as he had made me; but now, when it is too late, I am penitent, and see the error of my ways—but I will find him yet, and all will end well; you will yet see Frank in this dear home, and welcome him as of yore."

But although she spoke thus hopefully there was a dread foreboding at her heart, and the cruel words she once uttered in Mrs. Joyce's home came back upon her in their full force—"Never more! never more!"—as they found an echo in her heart, like a wail for the dead.

Her aunt vainly endeavoured to dissuade her from her project, but all in vain; and one morning, when lowering clouds overspread the heavens, Vera left Sunnybank to face the dangers of the battlefield.

Once more she found herself at Dover, and embarked on the mail packet for Calais, en route for the seat of war, in company with other ladies—devoted Englishwomen—bound upon a mission of mercy which the illustrious Florence Nightingale had been among the first to inaugurate.

She was entering the train when Mr. Cotswold came up, and, raising his hat, said:—

"Mrs. Beverley, we are to be fellow-travelers, I presume?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. HONEYWOOD'S DECLARATION.

When Vera left Elderton all sunshine seemed departed out of Violet's life, and but for the

presence of little Robin she must have lost her health, so greatly did she feel the separation.

Cotswold having gone away in disgrace was another source of bitter regret to her, for she loved him with all the strength and freshness of her pure young heart, and to have her idol shattered was a sad blow to her hopes of future happiness.

"He will never come again," she murmured, as she sat in the nursery watching the chambers of the child as the sun went down over Cadre Idria, dying the snow with glorious tints such as no painter could transfer to canvas. "It has always been so. Those I love leave me with no hope of meeting them again; surely the other works, and our house is doomed to suffer in expiation of that deed of blood."

She drew Vera's last letter from her pocket and perused it, as she had done already a score or more times, kissing it, and murmuring loving words, as if it were sentient with life and could return her caresses.

Her lovely eyes filled with tears as she thought of the many happy hours they had spent together, and how pleasantly the time had sped when Vera was at Elderton in quite a succession of happy moments, bound together by love and affection.

Vera had told her in this letter that she was going to France in search of her husband, to find him, it might be, amid war's horrid din, too late, perhaps, for the reconciliation she now so ardently longed to effect.

"Why do people who love each other behave so cruelly? I could never treat Robert so, whatever his faults might be. I wonder if papa would allow me to join Vera! I might be of some use out there, instead of being alone in this great house, eating out my heart with sadness."

Then she looked at his child, and, bending low, kissed it tenderly, murmuring:—

"For your dear papa's sake I must stay with you; I am your mamma now, and will never leave or forsake you, my pet."

Such were her almost daily communings, which always left her sad and wretched, but not for long together, youth not being the time for sadness, especially such as she, whose buoyant nature threw off, like an April sun, the shallow clouds and mists that envelop it.

Her father bore up bravely under his bitter disappointment, and sought in a round of duties not to forget the past, but to discipline his mind to endure pain, which left its mark, however, on his brow, and aged him by many years.

At times his eyes wandered unconsciously round the drawing-room in search of her, and he listened for her footsteps, awakening from his reverie with a weary sigh and a dull pain at his heart.

Mr. Honeywood called frequently, and was always a welcome visitor, particularly with Violet, who began to like him exceedingly, and made him her confidant regarding her future schemes respecting Robin.

It was quite laughable to hear her discuss this subject, with all the seriousness of a privy councillor.

"I am quite undecided as yet," she said, "what to make him. Sometimes I think I would like him to be an admiral or a general; then, at others, I fancy he would be just the thing for a bishop."

"Indeed, said Mr. Honeywood, "why, might I ask?"

"Oh! he is so eloquent, and looks as solemn as an owl sometimes, and then laughs so unctuously, and rubs his hands together just like papa's friend, the Bishop of Llandoff."

"Don't you think it is rather early to speculate about the choice of a profession for your protégé?" Mr. Honeywood asked, "considering he is not quite two years old yet."

"Oh! dear no, certainly not; he is an uncommon child; besides, I am anxious to foster his tastes."

"His what?" asked Mr. Honeywood, with an amused smile.

"Tastes; that is, his choice of toys, for you know my plan is to choose his profession at once, while he is a baby, by giving toys, such as ships if I decide upon him becoming an admiral; or guns and cannons, large boxes of soldiers, if he is to be a general; or toy pulpits and churches if a bishop. I know he won't be a farmer, for I bought him a lamb and he pulled all the wool off in a moment; and then beat the poor thing unmercifully. He is a wonderfully clever child, and bound to become something very great."

Mr. Honeywood's reply was a hearty laugh over her novel plan for developing the faculties of infants; and in the middle of it Robin awoke, and held out his arms to be taken up, crying lustily until he had his way.

As he continued to be a little fractious, Mr. Honeywood begged that he might be permitted to try and pacify him.

"I am so fond of little ones, and they seem to understand me," he observed, ready to martyr himself for the sake of pleasing her, for in his heart he disliked babies, because they had a habit of disarranging his carefully prepared toilet.

He took Robin in his arms and cooed and chirruped to him most winningly, and ought to have been successful in his efforts, considering the pains he took; but Robin was obdurate, and resented the kindly efforts by grasping one of his reverence's whiskers, which he tugged at with all his might, yelling like a Red Indian, while his victim writhed under the torture, fearing to scold the offender, although tears of pain welled into his eyes.

"Naughty boy!" said Violet, laughing, and untwisting his fingers; "you have the bump of destruction fully developed, I fear. I really must apologize for him, Mr. Honeywood; I fear he has been very rude."

"Not at all," said the patient martyr, as he looked ruefully at a portion of his whisker which Robin still grasped, having torn it out by main force. "He is a most interesting child, I may say quite a paragon, and does credit to your training; I love him because I can see he loves you."

"How kind of you to say so; but your profession teaches you to love everybody, even your enemies."

There was a mischievous twinkle in her blue eyes that meant more than her words expressed, for she had seen for some time past that he was on the eve of a declaration, and hoped to avert it, because she had no wish to pain him by a refusal.

"But even I, Miss Elderton, can love some more dearly than others, yourself for instance. I am now in a position to speak to you,"—here he became confused, and wiped his brow with his cambric handkerchief, while he toyed nervously with his Albert.

"Some charitable project," she said, trying to look unconcerned. "I shall be only too willing to assist you in every way in my power."

In sheer desperation he plumped down on his knees, disregarding his fallen eyeglass, which shivered to atoms on the steel fender, and seizing her hand, said:—

"Dearest Miss Elderton, I am now Sir Adolphus Honeywood, and the possessor of a handsome fortune which, together with my heart, I lay at your feet; say I am not indifferent to you, say—"

Here he looked round half angrily, for the audacious Robin had crawled to where he knelt, and had put his little hand up the leg of his trousers, and was trying to drag down his silk socks over his boots, cooing and laughing with all his might at having discovered a new game to amuse himself with.

Consternation filled the parson's face, for it was impossible to proceed with his declaration while Robin's fingers were tickling and clawing, nor could he rise without danger of hurting him. In his heart he anatomized the inquisitive child for placing him in such a ridiculous dilemma, and cast imploring glances at Violet to relieve him from it.

With a burst of merry laughter she snatched up the delinquent, saying,—

"Pray rise, Mr. Honeywood; I am sorry little Robin interrupted your pretty speech, for which I thank you, and were I inclined to marry I can only say that my choice of a husband—"

"Oh, bless you for those words," he said with eager haste, "they fill me—"

"Stop! stop!" she cried, "and hear me out. My choice would not fall upon you, much as I respect you; I esteem you as a dear friend, almost as a brother. Be content, and forget that you ever spoke to me of love seriously."

His face fell, and he rose painfully, for he had been kneeling on the hearthstone, which was not quite as soft as a cushion.

Holding out her hand with a sweet smile, she bade him "good day," and he bowed himself out of her presence, sick at heart at his disappointment.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VERA SAVES COTSWOLD.

VERA was thunderstruck at being accosted by Cotswold, whom she had fondly hoped would never cross her path again.

"This must be fate," she murmured, as she entered the carriage, having merely bowed to him by way of recognition.

But he persistently followed her in, and took his seat almost opposite her, saying,—

"I am on my way to join the Red Cross Society, Mrs. Beverley, and will be glad if I can be of any service to you on the journey. I saw from the papers that Mr. Beverley had already joined the society as surgeon; are you, too, enrolled under the same banner?"

Something in his manner caused her to forget her annoyance, and she replied,—

"Yes; I have joined Lady Strangford's staff, and hope to be of some use to the wounded."

"By the way, have you heard any news from the Towers? I am in sad disgrace there, and have not heard a word."

"Not on my account, I hope?" she said, "for I made no complaint."

"No. Mrs. Devereux was kind enough to embitter his lordship against me. But there, I deserve it all, and am now resolved to lead a better life, and hope to regain your confidence."

"That would be an easy matter," she replied, "for I was not blameless myself. We each have made a great mistake, and would do well to take the lesson to heart; remember that there is someone at Elderton who will never forget you; strive to be worthy of her, Mr. Cotswold, and you may yet find true happiness."

There was something so soft and winning in her manner, so sympathetic and womanly, so unlike her former self, when she was always armed against his insidious approaches, that his heart was touched, and he felt inclined to reveal to her the secret of her being a kinswoman and rightful heir to half the fortune he was in possession of.

But indecision spoilt his intention now, as it had ever done, and he allowed the opportunity to pass, deferring it to another time.

During the silence that ensued she leant back in the carriage, and, with closed eyes, took a retrospect of the past months of danger in which the man opposite her had figured so prominently.

She remembered the night she left her husband, and how she travelled up to town with Cotswold, then a perfect stranger, and wondered much how it was that he should be thrown across her path so repeatedly and mysteriously, and she prayed earnestly that he might, for dear Violet's sake, be a better man indeed.

She was aroused from her reverie by Cotswold saying,—

"Dear Mrs. Beverley, you may deem my request a strange one, but, believe me, I am serious, and do not prefer it without proper

motives; should anything happen to me, which is not improbable, will you place yourself in communication with my solicitors, whose address you will find on this card. Do not press me for a reason, but oblige me by acting as I wish."

She thought he had taken leave of his senses, and scrutinized his face keenly, but saw nothing in its expression to justify her suspicions.

"Nothing will happen to any of us I trust," she said, gravely.

"I must own the truth," he replied, "I am going not to join the Red Cross Society but to enrol myself under the tricolour as a *franc-tireur*, so you perceive that I am justified in saying something may happen to me."

"But why should you hazard your life, Mr. Cotswold, when it is so dearly prized by your kinswoman?"

"I am tired of life," he said, moodily; "and have wasted it hitherto. I love the brave French nation because my mother was of them; and better far is it to meet death as a soldier on the battlefield than to rust out, regretted by none, a mere wail on the troubled sea of life."

"I will do your bidding," she said, softly; "but earnestly hope the occasion will not arise."

"How strangely events turn out," he said, dreamily; then, with startling abruptness, he added, "You remember Edith Chaboner?"

"Yes, and often think of her untimely fate—deserted by friends, left to make her last home among strangers."

"Aye, it is too true, Mrs. Beverley; and you saw before you her husband."

"Edith's husband, and the father of little Robin! Does Violet know of this?" she asked, in a tone of astonishment.

"Yes, she knows all. Can you forgive me, Mrs. Beverley, now that I have told how heartless I have been?—how cruel to you?"

She held out her hand, and said,—

"Yes; my own faults have taught me to be charitable to others."

He pressed her hand with tender respect, and, raising his hat, bade her good-bye as the train drew up at his terminus.

"What a revelation," she thought, as the train sped on its way. "He has indeed sown the wind and reaped the whirlwind; there is something noble in his nature, despite his many imperfections. I am glad that Violet has the care of his child; the tie will deepen her affection for him, and the poor little fellow will never want a true friend."

After a fatiguing journey, Vera and her companions arrived before Paris, which was besieged by the German legions, and for the first time in her life she heard the thunder of cannon fired in anger.

It was a new epoch in her hitherto gentle life to find herself confronted by armed hosts; bronzed warriors filled with a lust for blood, carrying fire and destruction wherever they went, harrowing the land like an army of locusts.

She found that she was too late to join the French army, owing to the close investment of the capital, the German commander refusing to pass anyone through his lines.

During her interview with the Crown Prince, he remarked, while expressing his regret at her and her companions' disappointment,—

"We are in need of aid for our sick and wounded; will you not help us for the sake of our nation, and for that of my dear wife, who is an Englishwoman?"

This manly, straightforward appeal went to the heart of Vera and the other ladies, all of whom consented to transfer their services to the German army.

While cannon roared, musketry rattled, sabres gleamed, and flames sprang upwards, and the fierce cries of the combatants, during *arties*, went straight to Heaven, Vera sat in the hospital nursing the sick and wounded, and wondering where Frank was; whether Providence had spared him, or if he was then laying under the earth in the cold embrace of death,

The days passed wearily on for her, bringing her no nearer the goal of her hopes, with no alleviation of her sad forebodings that every shot fired might strike her husband down.

In the silent watches of the night, unbroken save by fitful sounds of musketry, and the occasional thunder of cannon, her mind travelled, in thought, to the shores of dear old England, where all was peace, and no rude foe dared to break in upon its sacred quietude—where no weeping widows or desolate orphans or homeless wanderers, aged and infirm, were driven from the shelter of the homestead to perish amid snows and biting frosts.

She pictured Violet and her father at the Towers, seated by their warm fireside, without a thought of how many thousands in France were exposed to the bitter cold of an almost Arctic winter, and wondered whether they still remembered her and the mission she had come upon.

One thing pleased her greatly—King William's solicitude for his soldiers, and the high respect in which he held the lady nurses, those of the English nationality especially.

On one occasion he had a long conversation with Vera, in the course of which he remarked,—

"Your nation is one of the grandest of all, for wherever there is suffering there you are to be found, setting a good example, you ladies more especially; and by your gentle presence and soothing words alleviating the worst horrors of war. I salute you, madam, in the name of our Fatherland."

This kind speech gave Vera courage to say,—

"Your Majesty, my husband is serving with the Red Cross Society, on the French side. It would gladden my heart to hear tidings of him, but hitherto I have been unable to do so."

Calling General Moltke forward, he said,—

"Send a flag of truce, general, to-morrow, and inquire about this lady's husband, who, like herself, is engaged in noble work."

Without waiting for her thanks the king left her to kneel at the bedside of a dying hero, on whose breast he pinned the coveted decoration of the "Iron Cross," and pressed his fellow-soldier's clammy hand, on whose face there stole a sweet smile, and into whose fast-glazing eyes there came a bright gleam of happiness ere the soul-winged its way above, where war or any such thing is unknown.

True to his kingly word, the very next evening he came in person to assure her of her husband's safety, who was alive and well, and she sent up a silent prayer of gratitude to Heaven for its mercies.

A few days after this event Vera was passing the hut where prisoners were usually confined, and was surprised when a Prussian officer accosted her, saying,—

"Pardon me, madam, but there is an English prisoner under my charge, sentenced to death. He wishes to see someone of his own nation. Perhaps, for the sake of charity to one so near his end, you would visit him."

Without a word she followed the officer into the hut, and there found herself in the presence of Cotswold.

"Mrs. Beverley!" he said. "This is, indeed, an unexpected meeting; but I am glad to see you. My hours are numbered, and I wish to send a message of love to my son and kinsfolk. No one can convey it better than you: will you do so?"

"But why are you to die?" she asked, her face pale with emotion. "What have you done?"

"Nothing; at least, that is my opinion. But the Germans have no mercy on *franc-tireurs*, and I happen to be one of such."

"But you shall not die. I will go to the king this instant, and beg your life on my knees. It would kill Violet if you were executed and leave your child fatherless. No, no; his Majesty is merciful, and will listen to my prayer."

"It is useless," said Cotswold. "Besides



[“MRS. DEVERLEY, WE ARE TO BE FELLOW PASSENGERS, I PRESUME?” SAID ROBERT COTSWOLD.]

I do not fear death, which has no horrors for me. I have a further revelation to make to you, and——

But before he could say more she rushed away, and was speeding with hot haste in the direction of the headquarters staff.

“His Majesty is engaged upon important matters, and cannot see you, I fear,” said an aide-de-camp, to whom she had addressed herself.

“But if he knew it was a matter of life and death he would not refuse to see me.”

At this moment Count Bismarck came to the door with a despatch in his hand.

Flying towards him, Vera said, “Oh, sir, I must see the king; do not refuse my request.”

Hearing her voice his Majesty came forward and led her into the hut, where he was in deep conference with his generals.

“Oh, sire,” she cried, “it is the prerogative of kings to show mercy. My friend, Robert Cotswold, lies under sentence of death. Spare him; he is young, and there are those in England who love him, and the bullet that strikes his heart would reach theirs also.”

“Of what crime is he charged, madam?”

“Of being a *franc tireur*, sire.”

“Then I regret I cannot interfere; his offence is heightened by the fact of his being an Englishman, against whom we are not at war,” he replied, in accents of severity.

“But English men and women risk their lives to save both Germans and Frenchmen. This boon, sire, which I crave would be granted not to me but to the entire English nation. On my knees I supplicate for mercy and pardon for my misguided countryman.”

She sank before him and looked up into his face with an earnest, imploring expression that touched him to the heart.

“You have conquered,” he said. “I spare his life on condition that he returns to England as soon as possible.”

Seating himself at the table he wrote a few words rapidly and delivered it to an aide-de-camp, when Vera said,—

“Sire, I thank you from my soul; but let me be the bearer of good tidings to my friend.”

“As you will,” was the gracious reply, as he handed her Cotswold’s pardon.

But when she had gone he told an aide-de-camp to follow her to see that the matter received immediate attention.

With swift footsteps and a face suffused with joy she fled along the intervening space, and reached the guard-but almost breathless, only to find that Cotswold, with a batch of other prisoners, had already been led to the place of execution.

She realised the awful fact of being too late, and for a moment she was stunned, but by a great effort she rallied her mental faculties, and inquired where the fatal spot was to be found.

The aide-de-camp, who had caught her up, now said,—

“Follow me quick, or your friend is lost.”

They both ran, and her heart nearly stood still when she heard the rattle of a platoon of musketry, which sounded the death-knell of some unfortunate; but she struggled on, and with her companion came in sight of the place of blood, where Cotswold, with unbandaged eyes and form proudly erect, waited for the leaden hail which was to shatter the life out of his body.

In vain she tried to shout, her voice failed her completely; and all she could do was to wave her handkerchief as a signal of reprieve.

But the aide-de-camp, in the tones of a stentor, shouted,—

“Hold!”

The officer in command of the firing-party was just about to deliver the word of command that would have hurried his prisoner into eternity when the voice of mercy reached him.

The rifles were lowered, and with a loud cry of joy Vera rushed forward, and throwing her arms around Cotswold’s neck, sobbed out,—

“Saved! saved!”

Then her noble fortitude gave way, and she would have fallen if Cotswold had not caught her on his supporting arm.

“Saved! and by her,” he murmured; “she has given me back life, and I will devote it to her service.”

(To be continued.)

IRISH BULLS.

An Irishman once said, “Talk of Irish ‘bulls.’ Ye’ll find the people in every country makin’ Irish ‘bulls’ jist as much as the Irish!” Although he made a bull himself, yet there is a degree of truth in his assertion.

The man who, on tasting an apple pie with some quinces in it, burst out with the exclamation, “How delicious an apple pie would be if it were made entirely of quinces!” gave a good specimen of an Irish bull.

So also the sailor who had taken a dislike to a ship, when he was told that he might safely trust himself to her as she was finely copper-fastened, answered:—“Thank’ee, sir; I would not sail in her if she were coppered with gold;” thus making a genuine Irish bull.

Here we have in perfection a contradiction of meaning, just as in a newspaper announcement that tells us that the “temporary works round H—” are intended to be permanent; and in the passage in a book of travels which informs us that in some French inns the “maid servants are all men.”

NONE can tell but he that loves his children how many delicious accents make a man’s heart dance in the petty conversation of those dear pledges; their childishness, their stammering, their little angers, their innocence, their imperfections, their necessities, are so many little emanations of joy and comfort to him that delights in their persons and society.



[ANOTHER MOMENT SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN IN THE WATER, BUT THAT HUGH'S ARMS WERE AROUND HER.]

NOVELETTE.]

WINNING IF WAYWARD.

CHAPTER I.

MAG.

"A rosebud set with little wilful thorns,
And sweet as English air could make her she."
TENNYSON.

A NARROW street in a well-known South London suburb, a little room whose shabby furniture had perhaps seen better days and whose arrangement and scrupulous neatness told of refined taste; the summer sunshine joining in through the white blinds, making the parlour an oven in point of temperature, and falling full upon the soft hair of a girl who sat near the window busy at needlework.

She was pretty—very pretty—even in her plain blue cambric dress; and seen amid those shabby surroundings Mag Lindsay's face would have attracted notice. She was barely eighteen, very slight and fragile looking, with large, clear grey eyes, a complexion of the purest cream coloured hue, and hair of that especial auburn tint which seen in the sunshine looks like threads of gold.

"Oh, dear, how hard it is to be poor," and Mag examined the holes in a small stocking with a very rueful face, as she prepared to mend it.

Her companion, a weary looking woman with a troubled anxious face, interposed.

"Leave it to me, dear, and go out for a walk; this hot weather tries you indoors."

"No, it doesn't," said Mag, energetically, making an onslaught on to the stocking; "and you know, you never would get through the work alone, you very wicked woman."

Mrs. Lindsay submitted to the assertion meekly, she very rarely contradicted her step-daughter, between whom and herself a strong affection subsisted.

"I expect I shall have to get through it some day, Mag," she remarked, quietly.

Mag smiled. "While I am at Carruthers, I suppose you mean. It won't be long, mamma; they'll get tired of me in a week. I can't imagine why they asked me; I'm sure I wish they hadn't."

"It was for your papa's sake, I expect." That was possible; Mr. Lindsay was a professional coach, and his exertions having passed a remarkably stupid son of the Carruthers through an important examination, the parents had honoured his eldest daughter with an invitation to their country seat. Mag had never been away from home before since she could remember, and the visit was therefore one of no small importance.

"I shall not stay long, mamma." "I was not thinking of that. I expect by next summer you will have left us altogether."

Miss Lindsay never attempted to misunderstand her meaning.

"I never mean to marry anyone," said the young lady, very decidedly, "you can be quite easy about it."

"It would be the best thing, Mag," returned the stepmother, kindly, "you are much too young and pretty to spend the best years of your life here."

"What! you want to get rid of me?" a little hurt.

Mrs. Lindsay did not say exactly that, but she gave Mag to understand, pretty plainly, it would be very much to their interests as well as her own if she made a good match; and then, after a glance at the clock, the stepmother went upstairs to get ready for tea, just as a loud knock sounded at the front door. Another moment and the little servant ushered in a visitor, a tall, handsome man of five or six-and-twenty.

"I am afraid papa will not be home till late," apologized Miss Lindsay, hiding her stockings in her pocket with remarkable self-possession. "It does not matter; my visit is to you."

"But I am not ill," said Mag, frankly. "I assure you, Dr. Tempest, I never felt better in my life."

He had taken a chair near her; an uncomfortable sensation came to the girl. Why did he look at her like that? She began to feel hot all over.

"Mamma will be down, soon," she began, devoutly wishing Mrs. Lindsay would make haste.

"Let me speak to you now, then, before she comes," he said, simply, drawing his chair a little nearer hers, and taking one of the small hands in his, "Mag, darling, we have not known each other very long, but you are more than all the world to me. Dear, don't you understand my wishes? I want you to be my wife."

"Your wife?" For the life of her she could say no more. The words would not come; she sat there, her head in a sort of maze; the room and its contents seeming to revolve round her.

"Is it so very wonderful?" he repeated, a little indignantly. "Mag, surely you guessed my secret long ago?"

"I never guessed anything in my life," she answered, penitently. "I suppose I am very stupid. Oh, Doctor Tempest, I am so sorry, I wish you had not said this."

"The saying it makes little difference," he answered, gravely. "Darling, do you mean to tell me it is all in vain—that I am too late in the field?"

"You are not too late—but—" "Mag, answer me, do you care for anyone else?"

"Whom else should I care for?" with an innocent little laugh. "We know no one positively, Dr. Tempest. Until you came to attend papa last winter I had never spoken to a young man in my life."

But he did not share her laugh, he was too terribly in earnest even to smile. For him there was but one woman in the world; this child with her grey eyes and auburn hair had crept into his heart and made it all her own.

"Do you dislike me, Mag?"

"I like you very much," she returned, frankly, "better than anyone I know."

"Then surely——"

"But I don't love you the least bit in the world," declared Mag. "Dr. Tempest, I don't think I ever shall love anyone. I was telling mamma this afternoon I thought I should be an old maid."

John Tempest took both the little hands in his, and held them in a close embrace.

"I will make you so happy, darling, if only you will let me; no trouble that love can sweet shall ever touch you. Mag, won't you have pity on my great love and promise to be mine?"

But a strange reluctance came to the girl, some mysterious instinct seemed to hold her back.

"Supposing we were married," his heart throbbed at the bare mention of such a thing, but she spoke so calmly as possible, "supposing we were married, and I never learned to care for you more than I do now?"

"You would learn, I would teach you."

"But supposing I did not?"

"Even then," he said, bravely, "I would rather have you than lose you, so that you love me no one else. I have little fear of winning my wife's heart at last."

He was a rich man's only son, already advanced in his profession. It was a match far beyond what Miss Lindsey could have expected, but it was characteristic of John Tempest that he never once mentioned all he could give her; the one thing he dwelt on was his great love, his passionate lasting affection.

"I wish you hadn't told me this," cried the girl, in a sad hurt tone. "I liked you so much, and now you have spoilt it all; things never can be quite the same again."

"Never quite the same," he argued, "but how much dearer, how much brighter?"

Mag sighed. Young, handsome, rich, and talented, it did seem to her passing strange that he should desire a wife who had no love to give him.

"I am waiting for my answer," said Dr. Tempest. "Little girl, are you going to break my heart?"

"It wouldn't do that, would it?"

"It would take all the joy and brightness out of my life. Mag, won't you be pitiful?"

"If only I loved you."

"That will come in time. I have spoken to Mr. Lindsay; he gave his full and free consent. He was even generous enough to wish me success."

The memory of her stepmother's words recurred to Mag; she had known the young physician's wishes and spoken with interest. Her parents wished her to marry Dr. Tempest; she liked him very much; she did not love him, but she fancied she was not the kind of girl to love anyone; if he could be content with her esteem and liking, perhaps she had better accept him.

The girl put her hand wearily to her head; the interview seemed to her to have lasted hours.

"If you quite understand and really wish it," she said, at last, "I will be engaged to you, but remember I don't feel as you do; I think I never shall."

"My darling, you have made me very happy. Oh, Mag, you little know how bitter the suspense has been to me."

Miss Lindsey thought she might improve the opportunity to make a few conditions.

"You won't want me to be married for years and years, will you?" she said, coaxingly, "because you know I really couldn't."

"I think you could."

"Oh no, I couldn't leave mamma and the children for ages; besides, you know I ought to care a great deal more for you first, so you won't speak of it for ever so long will you?"

Dr. Tempest committed himself to no rash promises; he stroked the girl's soft hair with a gentle caressing touch which had in it already a fond air of possession.

"I wonder how long it will take you," he said at last, gravely, "to learn to love me."

"Ages. I never learned a lesson quickly in my life."

"Well, at least you have promised to be my wife, I suppose I ought to be contented; but oh, Mag, if you know how dear you are to me."

"I wish I wasn't," she said, ruefully, "you shouldn't begin with such an exalted opinion of me; I'll come down with a rush, until it's even lower than I deserve, though that's low enough, for I am full of faults."

"I never see any."

"Well you haven't seen very much of me."

"That can soon be remedied," he returned, cheerfully. "I mean to see a great deal in future; I expect Mr. and Mrs. Lindsay will get quite tired of me, I shall come to see them so often."

"You will cheer them up while I am away."

"Away! Where are you going, Mag?"

"I am going into the country next week on a visit; only I expect Dr. Tempest, I have never been away from home before since I can remember."

And what a simple, humble home it was! How very few her pleasures had been, yet how bright and joyous she always seemed.

"You must not stay away long, little girl; remember I can't depart you."

"Oh, you won't miss me much," she returned lightly, "you will have all your patients to think about."

"And this little hand is really to be my own some day. I can hardly believe in my happiness, Mag."

"The coming is to be a very long way off remember, Dr. Tempest."

He paused.

"How long do you mean to go on calling me that?"

"Calling you what?"

"Dr. Tempest."

"It is your name, isn't it?"

"My name is John," he said, looking fondly into her grey eyes, "but at home I have always been called Jack."

Mag shook her head.

"I couldn't call you that, really," she said simply, "it would sound so very rude; remember I have hardly seen you half-a-dozen times."

"But if I wish it, if I want to hear my name from your lips, won't you try?"

"I suppose I must, if you really wish it."

"I wish that and something else," he said, gravely.

"What is it?"

"Can't you guess?"

"I never guessed anything in my life."

He put one arm round her and drew her to himself.

"Kiss me, Mag."

"I couldn't," she answered, quickly. "I never kiss anyone except papa and mamma and the children."

"I am glad to hear it, but you will add me to the exceptions." He bent down and kissed her two or three times, but there was no responsive pressure of her lips. Mag Lindsey never blushed at her lover's caresses, her eyes never drooped beneath the passionate gaze of his, she had told him the simple truth—she liked him very much, but she did not love him the least bit in the world.

Mrs. Lindsay came in presently, radiant in her best dress and solitary lace collar; John Tempest went to meet her and took her hand.

"Congratulations to me," he said, warmly, "Mag has promised to be my wife."

"Not for ages though," put in Miss Mag demurely, and then she took advantage of the opportunity to escape from the parlour to the kitchen, where with very hot cheeks she busied herself in helping Susan with the preparations for the family six o'clock tea.

"How dared he," thought the girl a little angrily, thinking of the caress. "I hope he will never kiss me like that again. I cannot understand why people who are going to marry each other should be so fond of that sort of thing."

Two or three days passed, Mag's engagement was an established fact, and Dr. Tempest spent all his leisure time in the little house at Brixton. Every one liked him, from the grave scholarly father to the youngest child; he was always welcome. Mag began to think she must be very ungrateful not to care for him more; she avoided *l'été à l'été* with him as much as possible, otherwise she rather enjoyed his society, though she never allowed the slightest reference to the time when her engagement should pass into something else.

The question had been mooted whether in the changed state of things a little note should not be sent to Mrs. Carruthers, asking her to accept Miss Lindsey's excuses, but Miss Lindsey herself had negatived this.

"I had better go, mamma; they might be offended after us letting them fix the day and all. I shall not stay long, you know."

So it was settled. The night before her departure Dr. Tempest made his appearance early in the evening, the children had gone out with their mother, Mr. Lindsay was shut up in his study, the lovers could enjoy an undisturbed *l'été à l'été*.

"I wish you were not going," said the doctor, suddenly.

"I shall not be away long."

"How long?" he demanded, with all a lover's impetuosity.

"I don't know at all. Mrs. Carruthers did not say."

"Well, you will write to me every day."

"Every day," rejoined Mag, laughing. "No, indeed; why I should have nothing in the world to say, unless I fell back upon a description of the dinner."

"Has Mrs. Carruthers a son?" jealously.

"Half-a-dozen, more or less."

Dr. Tempest frowned so fiercely that Mag relented, and added, gently,—

"But one has just sailed for India, and the others are at school, unless it's holiday time."

Her lover's brow cleared. He took a little leather case from his pocket, and opening it produced a beautiful ring, a half hoop of large pearls set in thick gold.

"Dear," he said, taking her left hand in his and placing the ring upon its third finger, "I want you to wear this until you let me give you a plainer one."

Mag gazed at it with admiring eyes.

"It is much too beautiful for me."

"Nothing can be that, dear; you will wear it for my sake."

"I will take great care of it."

But even as she spoke the ring fell from her finger to the ground. Mag had such slender taper fingers that no ordinary ring would stay on them. Dr. Tempest picked it up with an impatient sigh.

"I am very sorry," penitently said the girl.

"It is not your fault. I ought to have remembered what tiny hands you had. What shall we do, Mag? Can you wear another as a guard? I don't like to have it altered, people say it is unlucky."

"I will manage."

"And you are really going to-morrow, dear. Will you think of me sometimes while you are away?"

"Yes."

"And when you come back you will give me an answer to my question, and let me know when I may claim my bride."

She tossed her head. At present her visit to the Carruthers filled all her thoughts. She really hardly noticed the reply she was giving him. He rose to go.

"Good-bye, my darling," and he held her fondly in his arms. "Good-bye, my little Mag; come back to us your own bright self."

"As if I should come back anyone else—Jack." The last word was spoken with a little hesitation, and in such a low tone that it hardly reached his ears, but it did reach them, and at the sound a glad smile overspread his face.

"Good-bye, my own. My name never sounded so sweet to me before. Oh, little Mag,

I wonder whether when you come back you will have learnt your lesson."

The lesson he meant was love. It never occurred to him—it never crossed her mind—that she might learn the lesson, and yet it did not make him the happier; at present she was a child, her heart was sleeping, it would wake soon. The question was—would it awake for him?

CHAPTER II.

AT CARRUTHERS CASTLE.

"But pleasures are like poppies spread;
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or, like the snowfall in the river,
A moment white, then melts for ever."

BURNS.

"He is a tall, thin man, decidedly plain, but quite a gentleman," I daresay his daughter will be very shy and awkward, but I have no fears of her being vulgar and unsightly."

The speaker was Mrs. Carruthers. She was sitting in her own boudoir talking to her eldest girl, to whom she was entrusting the charge of driving to the station to meet Mag Lindsay.

"Poor little thing," said Miss Carruthers, thoughtfully, "I daresay she will feel quite frightened at coming among so many strangers."

"I wanted to show Mr. Lindsay some little mark of attention after all his trouble with Algy, and really I could think of nothing else," Muriel smiled.

"Well, it is almost time I started, mamma. Then I am to look out for someone tall and thin, who is plain, and appears to bear what one would imagine the stamp of belonging to a learned father?"

"Yes, make haste. Don't keep the poor child waiting."

It was a lovely August afternoon, the ponies bore their mistress quickly to the pretty rural station. Giving the reins to her groom, Muriel walked on to the platform just as the train from London came steaming in.

There were very few passengers who alighted, not half-a-dozen, and two being gentlemen still further simplified Miss Carruthers' task. She advanced towards a formidable-looking person in black, very tall and straight, with a kind of strong-minded air, whom she decided must be the tutor's daughter.

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to Miss Lindsay?"

The individual shook her head.

"My name's Brown," she returned, coolly, and Muriel walked away disappointed.

Just then her eyes fell on a fair, slender creature, almost a child, who stood talking to one of the porters; a girl in a pretty grey summer costume and black lace hat; Muriel's heart warmed to her immediately, she was so different from her anticipations.

Miss Carruthers felt it such a relief to be free from all fears of Miss Brown as her visitor.

"This is the young lady from the castle," said the porter to Miss Lindsay, by way of introduction, as Muriel advanced with outstretched hand.

"I am so glad to see you. Did you think we had forgotten all about you? It was all my fault. I fixed on a wrong person, and pursued her most energetically. Did you have a pleasant journey?"

Mag smiled in answer, and said, "Very pleasant, thank you. It was so kind of you to come and meet me."

"Not at all. Mamma would have come herself, only she is rather busy just now. We have a house full of visitors come to shoot the unlucky grouse. You know yesterday was the twelfth."

Miss Lindsay was not up in the dates of game slaughtering, but she followed Miss Carruthers to the carriage with a smile on her bright face, and in another moment the ponies had started; Mag's box following with the groom in a light cart.

"I am sure we shall be friends," said Muriel, suddenly; "Miss Lindsay, will you be displeased if I tell you you are not a scrap like what I expected?"

"I am very sorry."

"But I am very glad. I anticipated a very learned, strong-minded young lady, and I am quite sure you are nothing the kind."

"I certainly am not learned."

"Nor strong minded?"

"I think not."

"I see, we shall suit amazingly; now, tell me one thing more—can you flirt?"

Mag blushed.

"I don't think I ever tried."

"Never tried? What can people have been thinking of?"

"I only know one young man, you see," admitted Mag, humbly, "and I am sure he never flirts with anyone."

Miss Muriel looked her sympathy.

"He will soon alter that. Why, there are at least ten young men staying in the house now, and I am sure some of them will be delighted to practise with you."

"To practise what, Miss Carruthers?"

"Flirting, to be sure."

Mag gave an expressive little shrug to her pretty shoulders, but she had no time for a reply, as the carriage stopped that moment before the grand porticoed entrance.

Mrs. Carruthers' welcome was all that could be desired; she had invited Mag out of gratitude to her father, expecting she would be a dead weight on her hands. In this case virtue has its own reward, for the tutor's daughter proved the prettiest visitor Mrs. Carruthers had had for years—her own two daughters being engaged to most desirable parties; Mag's charms gave her no jealous pang, and she received her with cordial affection.

"Come upstairs and see your room," said Muriel, "I have told them to take tea up, and after you have had some it will be time to dress for dinner." The two girls grew intimate over the *à la carte* tea; Mag heard all about Muriel's engagement, and how her sister was one day to be a countess, and was just now travelling in Italy with her future mother-in-law; but the home-tied girl did not fully reciprocate these confidences; she told many an incident of her home life, but of the promise she had made to Dr. Tempest she spoke no word.

"I shall come and fetch you when I am dressed," said Muriel, rising at last. "I am sure you would never find your way downstairs alone."

Mag thanked her.

A neat maid appeared, to assist the young visitor, who rather shrank from letting her unpack the modest trunk, but the servant betrayed no surprise, and took out a simple white muslin, remarking—

"You will wear this to-night, I suppose, miss?"

It seemed great dissipation to Mag for a quiet family dinner, but she agreed at once. The maid coiled the bright hair gracefully round her head, fastened some forget-me-nots from a vase on the table among its masses, and a bunch of the same flowers at the throat of the white muslin dress. She surveyed her work with approving eyes.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, miss?"

Mag declined gratefully, and sat down in a low chair by the open window to wait for Muriel's approach. Voices fell on her ear; looking out she saw two gentlemen walking on the terrace in earnest conversation.

Hidden from their view by the muslin curtains the young lady could watch them unobserved; one was quite young, almost a boy, his companion—altogether in a different mould—tall, and dark, with stately step and flashing eyes.

"What became of Miss Carruthers this afternoon?" he asked, suddenly.

"Went to the station to meet a visitor—a young lady."

"Another young lady? Why, the house is full of them now. When people invite a man to a country house they ought to give him fair warning of the traps they've laid for him."

"You keep out of the traps pretty easy, Ainslie."

"But it spoils one's enjoyment all the same, Charley. What a delightful place the Castle would be without any women!"

"A monastery at once."

"Well, we would have Mrs. Carruthers, and her daughter, Muriel, is too devoted to her own property to be much of a nuisance to any one else."

"I wonder why you hate women so, Ainslie."

"I don't hate them, pretty dressed up dolls, they're not worth the trouble; I despise them."

"Then I wonder why you despise them."

"I see through their artifices."

"But, man alive, you can't suspect them all of wanting to marry you. Of course we know you're awfully rich and an uncommonly handsome fellow, but still that would be too much."

The other laughed.

"I don't deny there are a few fine women in the world; only they are mostly married or engaged. The girls one meets are mostly flirts."

The voice died away; Mag felt hot with anger.

"How dared he speak of women like that," she thought, passionately—"he must be a horrid man. I would like to see him over head and ears in love with some one, and then have them refuse him; he'd see then his money didn't take up everyone's thoughts as much as it seems to do his own."

Five minutes later and she was walking down stairs at Muriel's side. One glance round the drawing-room told her the two gentlemen, whose conversation she had overheard, were not there.

She sat down on a couch, and two of Muriel's brothers—pretty children of six and eight—came up to make acquaintance with her. Mag was fond of children, and she soon became fast friends with these; so engrossed with them was she that she did not notice the butler announcing dinner, and started to see Mrs. Carruthers at her side presenting a gentleman.

"Captain Egerton—Miss Lindsay."

She blushed frantically, for it was the tall fair man she had pronounced "boyish" to herself. He never seemed to notice her confusion but offered her his arm, and led her to the dining-room, where, oddly enough, they took their places opposite to Muriel-Carruthers and the dark stranger who had confessed to such an antipathy to women. After the first shyness wore off Miss Lindsay began to enjoy herself amazingly. Captain Egerton proved a most agreeable companion; he told her pleasant little anecdotes, and gave her various pieces of information.

"This is my first visit here, I think?"

"It is my first visit anywhere."

He was too well bred to express surprise.

"I dare say your parents cannot part with you often," with an admiring glance at the bright face.

"I don't think they would like to—but you see, Captain Egerton, they have never been tried; no one ever asked me anywhere before."

He smiled, he really could not help it.

"And do you think you shall like the Castle?"

"I am sure I shall; I think it is delightful, and Muriel is so nice."

"Miss Carruthers is charming. Don't you think my brother a very happy man?"

"Is she going to marry him?"

"He says so."

"And is that your brother opposite?" in an undertone.

"That," laughing at the bare idea, "that my brother! Oh! Miss Lindsay, you little know what you have suggested. Why that is Sir Hugh Ainslie; he'd have a fit if he heard anyone had taken him for an engaged man. He's a capital fellow, but he has one great fault—he can't get on with ladies."

"Why, don't they like him?"

"It is a more shocking want of taste than that he doesn't like them. I have often heard of women-haters, but I never quite believed in them until I met Hugh Ainslie."

"How horrid he must be."

"He's the best fellow I ever met. That's his only fault, Miss Lindsay, and it's a strange one."

Back again to the drawing-room; Mag feeling a little sleepy. No one made much effort to amuse themselves or other people; it was a real relief when coffee and the gentlemen appeared together. Captain Egerton steered straight for Mag's sofa.

For a little while he lingered there, then he was called away to sing a duet, and Mag was left alone. It was a very beautiful melody, and the words were almost touching in their pathos. Mag, who had a keen love for music, felt the tears rising in her eyes.

Remembering where she was she dashed them hastily away, and looked up to find Sir Hugh Ainslie standing before her with a very cynical expression on his face.

"Haven't you enough troubles of your own, Miss Lindsay, that you cry about other people's?"

"I was not crying."

"Then my eyes deceived me."

He lingered there, but Miss Lindsay had not forgotten the opinions she had heard him express, nor the description given her of him by Captain Egerton. She had no mind for him to include her among the young ladies who smiled too sweetly upon him, so she calmly turned round, with her back to the handsome baronet.

He was no whit disconcerted; he drew a chair forward and sat down near her.

"I think this is your first visit to the Castle, Miss Lindsay?"

"I wish you would find something fresh to say," returned the girl, frankly, "everyone begins talking to me by that remark. I shall think soon that my behaviour is eccentric, and you mean to imply this is my first exit from among the barbarians."

He looked puzzled.

"Do you like Yorkshire?"

"I haven't seen enough of it to say."

"It is the finest county of England."

"Really?"

"Undoubtedly; ask Miss Carruthers."

"That would not be fair."

"Why not?"

"Because it is her home."

"And you think everyone likes their home the best?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, I am an exception to your rule, I hate my home."

"Dear me!"

"Well, what blame are you attaching to me? The love of travel is part of some natures, you know."

"But generally of bad natures."

"You are flattering."

"People who are always moving generally seem to be trying to run away from themselves."

"You are quite a philosopher."

"I hate philosophy."

"And yet you have picked up a great deal."

"I have picked up a great deal; all I possess, I think."

"You must have been very industrious since you left school."

"I never went to school."

"Indeed! You were educated at home, probably?"

"I never had an education, I don't think it's necessary. Now-a-days girls never want anything except a husband, and education doesn't help them to that," went on Mag, audaciously bent on shocking him.

"You seem experienced?"

"Of course I am, fastness and beauty are the two necessities; old-fashioned qualities, such as cleverness, amiability, and so on, are quite out of date."

Sir Hugh looked at her aghast; he began to wonder where his friends the Carruthers could have picked her up. She went on recklessly,—

"I am going in for women's rights myself; will you come and hear me address a meeting, Sir Hugh? Come and listen to my maiden speech."

If she meant to disgust him she had succeeded; he began to think her the most dreadful specimen of women he had ever met, when Captain Egerton and Muriel Carruthers came up to them, and the latter laid one hand on Mag's shoulder.

"I am sure you are musical; mamma wants you to sing something for us, dear."

Ainslie expected her to refuse point blank; singing and women's rights don't generally go together; besides, Miss Lindsay had remarked her education was "picked up." To his amazement she made no demur, but taking Captain Egerton's arm crossed the drawing-room to the grand piano.

"Isn't she a darling?" asked Muriel, frankly. She had known Hugh Ainslie nearly all her life, and talked to him with the ease of an old friend. "Confess, Sir Hugh, even you think her charming?"

"Am I to state my real opinion?"

"Certainly."

"Then, I think—remember you have asked me my opinion—she is simply odious."

"Sir Hugh!"

"Fast, half educated, unladylike; I never saw a more unpleasant specimen of a girl of the period."

"Well, you astonish me; I should have described her as a dear, quiet little thing, who hardly had vanity enough to see how pretty she is."

"Is she pretty?"

"Of course she is; here is the sweetest face in the room," retorted Muriel. "Hush, she is going to sing."

"She will murder it," said Sir Hugh, discontentedly. "Fancy a girl like that singing; it will be a comic ditty, depend upon it."

But the first chords sounded soft and clear, showing that Mag Lindsay had a real talent for music; then the words followed, that sweetest and saddest of all love songs, "Auld Robin Grey." The girl sang with a taste and feeling rarely equalled; each word sounded clear and sweet; she seemed to have thrown herself into the character of the heroine, and be for the moment the sorely tried Janie of the Scottish ballad; there was a silence in the large drawing-room, the audience seemed to listen with hushed voice and bated breath to the fair young singer.

Sir Hugh Ainslie stood leaning against his chair, a strange doubt at his heart. Which was true, the deep sensitive feeling displayed in the song, or the independent, unwomanly utterances he had listened to before? He felt puzzled; he understood most girls at a glance, read their characters as an open book. Mag was an enigma to him. He stood still, motionless, gazing on the slender white-robed figure. So in his dreams he often saw her afterwards; in the black future so near approaching it was thus she appeared conjured up before his memory—no nearer, alas, but oh! how much more dear!

Many and deep were the thanks the girl received when her song was ended. With one voice the company begged for another, and stretching her hands over the keys Mag began the accompaniment to the "Last Rose of Summer." When the last note died away she looked up and saw Sir Hugh standing by the piano.

"I think you had better give up the idea of lecturing in public," he said, pleasantly; "if you want to convert people to your views put your arguments into songs, they would be much more convincing."

She answered nothing, she hardly seemed to hear him; she turned away and walked to Muriel's side, leaving the baronet thoroughly baffled and annoyed. Mag had only meant that he should not number her among the girls who wooed him, although; she had thought it would serve him right if he was made to woo himself, and that hopelessly; she had never intended that he should woo her. She little knew she had gone to work the way to bring about such a result.

Sir Hugh went to bed that night to dream of a pair of grey eyes which were destined

to trouble his repose very much in the days yet to come.

CHAPTER III.

A CRUEL DILEMMA.

"Oh! what a tangled net we weave,
When first we practice to deceive."

WATTS.

The August days passed swiftly, and to Mag Lindsay they brought some of the happiest hours she had ever known. In her heart Mag had rather dreaded this first visit to Carruthers Castle; she had thought the rich people there would despise her for her poverty. She soon learned better.

Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers—who loved young people dearly—petted the girl almost as a third daughter; Muriel treated her as a sister, and with one and all of the guests she was a favourite.

It often seemed to her afterwards, in looking back, that some presentiment ought to have warned her the time was too bright and happy to last, that by reason of its perfect sunshine she ought to have suspected clouds were not far off; but at the moment she never thought of this, she only knew that in all her nineteen years she had never been so happy before.

Only one thing troubled her—John Tempest's letters. They came every day; they breathed a love and devotion which touched her to the heart, and yet they were very difficult to answer.

The young doctor wrote so much of the future—the time when Mag would belong entirely to himself, and would love him as he loved her.

The girl used to sigh when she read those letters; to her the future seemed bounded by one horizon—her wedding-day; her one object in life seemed to be to postpone that as much as possible. As for the day when she would love her betrothed as he did her, she never thought of it; in her heart of hearts she fancied it would never dawn.

"Have you had bad news?" Sir Hugh asked her one bright August morning when he found her curled up in a corner of the deserted library, an open letter in her hand. "You look quite sad to-day, Miss Lindsay."

These two had never become friends. Mag thought the baronet cold and stern, proud and satirical.

She had a weakness for exhibiting to him the worst side of herself, and then—strange contradiction—she felt piqued at his not admiring it.

They rarely met without an argument. Muriel Carruthers called them sworn foes; Mag seemed to glory in the name, in reality it pained her.

She often thought she should have liked to have Hugh Ainslie for a friend, to trust herself and her troubles to his advice.

"I feel sad," she answered, at last.

"What is the matter?" and his voice had a strange seriousness in it. "I always think of you as the picture of careless mirth."

"I daresay you think I have no feeling," retorted Mag, crossly. "I'm sure I don't care; I wish I hadn't. I am quite sure it would be the pleasantest way of going through the world."

"You speak as if you were ninety."

"I am nineteen," answered Mag, quietly; "but I feel a hundred at the very least."

"You don't look like it. Come, Miss Lindsay, staying indoors has given you the blues this bright morning. Let us go for a walk."

She shook her head regretfully.

"I must write a letter."

"I had no idea your correspondence was so engrossing. I won't detain you a minute longer," returned the baronet, in a tone of the most injured dignity. "I regret to have interrupted you in your pleasing occupation."

"It isn't pleasing at all," retorted Mag. "I can't think of anything to say, and I have begun four times already."

"Poor child! Shall I help you?"

"I'm afraid you couldn't."

"Try me."
 "I am sure it would be no use."
 His eye darkened.
 "Give me your hand."
 "Why?"
 "I want to look at it."
 He took it with a strangely gentle touch, examined the third finger minutely, and released it.

Mag congratulated herself that John Tempest's pearls were safe in her box upstairs; she had never worn them since her arrival at the Castle, half from a fear of losing them—since the ring was still far too large—half from a girlish dread of the questions that might ensue.

"Why do you never wear rings?" asked Sir Hugh, suddenly. "Don't you know that you have very pretty hands?"

"No one ever told me so."

"Women generally discover such things for themselves," he answered, coldly.

"Sir Hugh, I have often wanted to ask you something."

"Ask away."

"You will think me rude—inquisitive."

"You have my promise, ask and I will answer. I am rather anxious, though, to hear your question. You can't be seized with an intense desire to know my age, because *Burke's Landed Gentry* would tell you directly that I am thirty next birthday."

"It was not that."

"Go on; I am all attention."

A deep blush crimsoned the girl's cheek.

"I want to know why you dislike women so much."

"Who told you I did?"

"I know you do."

"But how?"

"The first night I came here I heard you say so. No, I was not playing the eaves-dropper. I was sitting at the window of my own room, and I heard you talking to Captain Egerton."

The whole circumstance came back to Sir Hugh. He remembered every word of the conversation.

"You heard what I told Egerton?"

"Yes."

"That explains everything."

"What can you mean?"

"It has often puzzled me why you, who are so sweet and gentle to others, treated me from the first moment of our meeting with such scant courtesy. I understand now; you have been resenting my careless words. Do you think it was kind or generous, Miss Lindsay, to bear malice for what was never meant to reach your ears?"

"Perhaps not; but—"

"But it has made you quite an enigma to me. Of course I know now the fastness, the women's rights, and other vagaries of which you have told me, were assumed only to convince me you cared nothing for my opinion."

"I wanted to shock you."

"Well, you did not quite succeed. I know enough of women to guess at once that your attempts at fastness were only assumed, though, I confess, it puzzled me very much to guess why you assumed them."

"You promised to answer my question," said Mag, bent on carrying the war into the enemy's country.

"Did I? It is a long story."

"I like long stories."

He drew her hand in his arm and led her out through the open window into the grounds, down a shady lane to a little arbour where no one came; there he gave her a seat on a rustic bench and placed himself at her side.

"You really want to hear?"

"Yes," and at that moment she forgot both John Tempest and his unanswered letter.

"It is seven years ago. I was a raw lad of barely three-and-twenty, without much money or prospects. I had been bred to the law, for the chances of my inheriting the baronetcy were remote, and I earned about three hundred a year—not much to keep a wife certainly, yet

some women good and true have contrived to be very happy on it."

"And you were engaged?"

"I was engaged to a girl whom I thought the most beautiful creature on whom the sun ever shone. Her parents had given their consent; our wedding-day was fixed. I had taken a little house and furnished it with my savings ready for my bride."

The strong man's voice broke; there were beaded drops upon his brow, showing how much the memory cost him.

Mag interrupted him.

"Don't tell me any more," she cried, quickly, "indeed, indeed, I never guessed, I never meant to pain you so. I understand it all; she died, and you have been unhappy ever since."

"She did not die," returned Sir Hugh, recovering himself with an effort; "a month before our wedding-day she eloped with a man whose purse was longer than mine. . . . She took with her my hope and trust. From that day forward my faith in human nature died out; within a year I became Sir Hugh Ainslie of Ainslie. I have more money than I care to spend, and yet I have never been so happy as in the days when I planned and saved to furnish that humble house, which, after all, was never to be my home."

Mag's tears were falling fast.

"Forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive. Don't pity me," he said, almost roughly, "I can't stand that."

"But I do, perhaps," said Mag, with a great effort at hopefulness; "her husband may die some day, and then you can be happy yet."

A bitter smile crossed his face.

"Marry her now! Not if she were free to-morrow, and a duchess; you forget she deceived me."

"But if you loved her."

"My love is cold and dead—she killed it."

"It would revive—if you saw her."

He shook his head.

"Nothing can rekindle a dead love; besides, I have seen her many times. We have touched hands in a dance, and elbowed each other at a flower-show. I saw her last year down at Ryde, looking very old and very *passé*. I quite forgave her husband then for robbing me of her."

"I think you are very heartless."

"Why? You surely wouldn't be so cruel as to wish me to spend my days in regretting another man's wife, who behaved shamefully to me into the bargain."

"I thought love never changed."

He looked at her with a strange new tenderness dawning in his eyes.

"I thought you were going in for women's rights; they don't go hand-in-hand with love generally."

"I am not going in for either."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I hope so. I should feel very frightened if I tried to lecture people."

"And the other—love?"

"A great many people go through the world without it."

"Do they?"

"I think so."

He smiled.

"I am glad you are not quite sure."

There was a strange joy at her heart for which she could not account. Mag Lindsay had never felt so happy before, only that morning she had been quite sad to think her visit was so nearly over, but now she felt incapable of sadness or sorrow.

They went for a long walk that afternoon, Muriel Carruthers, Mag, and most of the guests staying in the house whom the shooting had not engrossed. Captain Egerton was Miss Lindsay's devoted cavalier; he never left her side until they had reached the spot where they were to boil their kettle gipsy fashion, and partake of five o'clock tea out of doors.

The young officer was a great favourite with Mag, but to-day a new fear seized her that he was going to ask her for something more than

friendship, something she could not give him, and so the girl decided to avoid all opportunities for a *l'été-à-l'été* going home, and so stave off the proposal she feared was coming.

But it was difficult; the whole party had arrived in pairs, save that Muriel had two cavaliers to make up, perhaps, for her lover's absence.

It was awkward to avoid the Captain, and so before the tea was quite over Mag strolled away from the others, intending to take a different path home through the wood, and offer the explanation that she had lost her way.

At first fortune favoured her, the wood was cool and refreshing, its shade a pleasant protection from the August sunshine. For some little distance she could hear the voices of her friends not far off, but at last a silence told her their paths had diverged.

She felt a little lonely then, the wood seemed to grow deeper and deeper. Mag plodded bravely on, but at last a fear came to her that she had indeed lost her way, that instead of nearing Carruthers Castle she was losing herself more and more completely at every step she took in the mazes of the wood.

She had no watch, and could therefore form no idea of the time; tea had been at five, the party were due at the castle for half-past seven o'clock dinner, but Mag fancied it must be nearly that now. Oh, how miserable and desolate she felt! Would she have to remain in this dreadful place all night? would no one think of her and come to her rescue. She pictured to herself the merry cheerful gathering round the dining-room table, and her place empty.

"Will he be sorry," she wondered sadly.

"Will he miss me just a little?"

And the "he" of whom the poor child thought was not the man she believed in love with her, but the one who never paid her a compliment, who believed all women false and heartless—Sir Hugh Ainslie of Ainslie.

"I must sit down," murmured the girl to herself. "I am so tired, so very tired, I can go no further. I wonder if I shall be dead when the sun comes back again? I used to think death would be very dreadful, but I fancy now I would rather die than marry Jack. . . . If I was Jack's wife it would be a sin ever to think of him again; and oh, Hugh, my darling, I can't help thinking of you; it is very foolish, very wicked, and unwomanly; but I love you. I can't help it, dear; you will never know it, but I shall love you till I die."

She sat down on the trunk of a tree and rested her head wearily against its branches; very pale and very fragile was her fair face; her grey eyes closed themselves wearily, and in a few moments she was asleep, looking almost like some stray fairy or wood-nymph who had wandered there.

So Sir Hugh Ainslie thought when coming suddenly upon her he beheld the picture. The baronet had noticed Mag's desertion of the others, and knowing she was quite a stranger to the Carruthers woods some instinct had made him excuse himself to Miss Carruthers and go in search of her, but it was so long before his search was rewarded that he called himself a fool for his pains, and decided she had met the others and returned with them.

"What a fool I am," he muttered. "Why should that child's face stir my very heart? I have seen the most beautiful women of Europe, and come off scot free. Surely I am not going to be taken captive by a little girl with a pair of grey eyes; that would be folly."

And as he arrived at this conclusion he came upon the object of his thoughts, her fair head leaning against the tree, her face as calm and innocent as a child's.

His first thought was that she was dead; her closed eyes, the almost waxen purity of her complexion gave him this fear, and with it came a knowledge of his own secret.

As he stood there looking at her he knew she was dearer to him than the whole world, that for this grey-eyed girl he would have sacrificed

home, name and fortune; the attachment of his early youth was as nothing to this deep passion of his manhood. It came on him as a revelation, that without Mag Lindsay his life would not be very much worth the living for, and she lay there unconscious, perhaps already in the arms of another bridegroom—death.

He raised her tenderly, he chafed the cold hands in his, he called upon her by every endearing name to wake and speak to him. At last he had his reward; those grey eyes opened slowly, and fixed themselves upon his face.

"I dreamed you would come. Where am I? what has happened?"

"You are safe, my darling," cried Hugh, brokenly. "Oh, Mag! if you knew what I had suffered; I thought you were dead."

"I was so tired," she said, speaking simply like a weary child, "I could not walk any further, and it was so dark, I felt frightened."

"You are not frightened now?"

"Not with you."

Recollection was coming back; a crimson blush dyed the girl's cheek as she noticed the protecting arm he had thrown round her.

"How did you find me?"

"I fancied you would lose your way; you are not quite such an independent person as you wish to appear."

How was sitting beside her, her fair head rested on his shoulder. The grey eyes could not meet his gaze, for Mag had found out her mistake; she knew now that she was not one of those women who can go through their life without loving, for her whole heart was Sir Hugh's.

"Mag!"

"Yes, alyly."

"Don't you think you had better change your mind?"

"What about?"

"You said this morning you should never love anyone, Mag, I want you—forget our miserable quarrels and misunderstandings of these three weeks, and be my wife."

How happy she would have been but for the thought of John Tempest and her engagement, but even that recollection could not rob this moment of its joy; she nestled the least bit closer to Sir Hugh.

"Are you quite sure you love me," she whispered; "remember what you told me this morning."

"What did I tell you, sweet?"

"About that other woman you cared for."

"I did love her, Mag, but not as I do you. It is the whole strength of my manhood's affection I offer you. Little girl, there is truth in those grey eyes if it lives anywhere; put your hand in mine and promise to be my wife."

It was not a month yet since another had pleaded to her. But, oh! how different her feelings as she listened. John Tempest's wooing had troubled her, had made her think herself cruel and heartless. Hugh Ainslie's filled her with a strange, new happiness. John Tempest's kiss had been almost suffering. She felt a silent rapture as Hugh pressed his lips to hers.

"Tell me that you love me," he said, proudly; "I will have no unwilling wife."

"I love you," whispered the girl, gently.

"Hugh, I think I have loved you all along, only I would not confess it even to myself, but—"

"Nothing can divide us if you love me."

She had meant to tell him all, but her courage failed her. She loved him so she could not bear to think of giving him up. John Tempest was a generous man; he would release her if she asked him. No one here knew of her engagement. And as she fancied she could keep the secret for all time from Sir Hugh.

It was a sad mistake, but she sinned for love of him. She could have risked the loss of his riches and rank, but she could not bear the idea of losing his heart, and so she deceived him. She said no word of her engagement, only as she nestled in his arms she pleaded,—

"Promise me that you will love me always,

Hugh. I couldn't bear for you to look harshly on me."

"I shall love you till I die," and he pressed his lips with passionate warmth to hers.

"I must take care of my treasure," he whispered at last. "Mag, it is getting late, darling; Mrs. Carruthers will be alarmed at your absence, I must take you home."

She rose and tried to walk, but she was evidently so spent and weary that he would not suffer it. He took her in his arms instead, and carried her through the wood. He only set her down when they were at the entrance to the Carruthers' grounds.

"When do you leave the Castle?" he asked.

"The day after to-morrow."

"I shall follow you the next day, Mag, will you ask Mr. Lindsay to receive me kindly?"

"Hugh," she said, in a kind of nervous terror, "do not come. Papa is very poor, you don't know how poor. Our home is not like Carruthers Castle."

"Do you think that makes any difference to love like mine? Can you think so meanly of me as to believe I should esteem your father less because he works for his living; but for my uncle's death I should be working hard enough myself. No, my darling, I promise you I will respect and honour Mr. Lindsay, even as you do."

"And you won't tell anyone?" she whispered.

"Hugh, let us keep our secret till I go home."

"Then don't let Egerton flirt with you, or I shall feel an irresistible temptation to knock him down, and as he happens to be my dearest friend I should be sorry to gratify it."

Mrs. Carruthers and her daughter received Mag as someone rescued from a great peril. Miss Lindsay did not come down to dinner that night; she spent the evening on the sofa in Muriel's boudoir, and that young lady bore her company.

"You will have to forget your dislike to Sir Hugh," she said laughingly; "you never could bear malice to anyone who saved you from spending the night in the wood."

"I don't bear him malice."

"I never could make out why you disliked him so; to me he seems just like one of the heroes of olden times. I don't believe he could do anything mean or untrue, he has such a horror of deceit."

Pleasant this to listen to for the woman who deceived him.

"You two are great friends," said Mag, thoughtfully, "I mean—"

"You need not," interrupted Muriel; "I know what you mean, but you need not think so."

Hugh and I are so much like brother and sister even to have been anything more, even if I had never known Bertie. I often wish Hugh would marry, but I don't think there's much chance of it; I told him the other day he'd want an angel at the very least."

"What did he say?"

"Said he'd prefer a fine woman, which was just as difficult to find as an angel."

"My dear Mag I think you must be feverish after your walk, your cheeks burn dreadfully."

"It is the wind!"

But it was not the wind, it was anxiety and shame—shame that she should be so far unworthy of the man she loved—anxiety, lest he should find out her secret and send her from him. It seemed to Mag she could never bear such a burden as her life would be if Sir Hugh took from her the measure of his love.

It never occurred to her to think of her sin against John Tempest or fear his decision—never once.

CHAPTER IV.

PARTED.

"Had we never loved so blindly, had we never loved so kindly,
Never loved and never parted, we had never been broken-hearted."

The weather had changed next day; the pleasant summer sunshine was gone; the sky was dark and lowering, the heavy rain poured

in torrents. Mag Lindsay woke with a strange feverish sensation that something new and wonderful had happened; she put her hand to her head, and tried to collect her thoughts. In a moment it all came back to her in a tumult of mingled joy and misery—joy, that Sir Hugh loved her, misery that she was so unworthy of his love.

In vain Mag tried to work out the problem. Only one thing was clear, she could not go to Hugh Ainslie and tell him that she had come to him with a falsehood on her lips; that when she accepted his love she was already the pledged wife of John Tempest. The opportunity for such a revelation was over; all that remained to her was to guard her secret at all hazards.

It was almost a relief to her when Muriel Carruthers coming in and seeing her flushed, feverish face, insisted on her not rising for breakfast.

"The men are all going out on a shooting expedition, in spite of the rain; you shall stay quietly here and only come down till luncheon, then we can have a cozy afternoon all to ourselves."

Mag agreed, at least it was some hours' respite. Left alone she swallowed a cup of coffee, but could not force anything more solid between her dry, parched lips. A maid bore away the tray, and Mag drew a tiny writing-case towards her, and took out Dr. Tempest's letters. She had only been twenty-one days at the Castle, but there were very nearly as many envelopes in that bold straggling hand which had very often evoked Muriel's curiosity.

She did not love him; we know her whole heart was given elsewhere, but a pang of remorse did smite her as she read those letters; they were so full of trust and confidence, every line breathed such love and devotion. There was many a mention of the home she was one day to share, many a tender inquiry whether she had "learned her lesson." The hot tears fell fast down Mag's cheeks; now that she knew what love was she could better feel for John Tempest; she was not a flirt, there was not one spice of coquetry in her nature, and yet she had wrecked this man's life.

"If only he had never loved me," murmured the girl to herself, "if only he would begin to care for some one else how happy we might all be."

About eleven o'clock a pleasant surprise awaited her. The maid who came to assist in her toilet put a little note in her hands, observing demurely that Sir Hugh Ainslie's man had given it to her.

"My darling," so ran the pencil scrawl, "they tell me you are ill, I hope it is not true; if you are really going away to-morrow, spare me five minutes to-night. Tell me where I can see you alone, and hear your sweet voice say once more that you love me."

The note dropped from her trembling fingers, and fell on to one of Dr. Tempest's; a strange superstitious feeling made Mag move it instantly. She folded up Jack's effusions and looked them carefully away, never noticing that in her haste she had forgotten one, which was lying in a blank envelope at her side. She had placed it there herself in that particular envelope, because it was her full intention to write to John that morning; and as her letters were simply answers to his, she always studied his last thoroughly before she began her unwelcome task.

Taking up a sheet of paper she wrote two lines, blushing rosy red the while: "After dinner, in the library." She slipped it into an envelope, and later on, when she was up and dressed, she crossed the corridor, and herself placed her first lover-letter on Sir Hugh's dressing-table.

She never quite knew how she got through that day; its hours seemed to her strangely long in passing. Fortunately, as she was going home on the morrow, packing took some time.

Nothing could have been kinder than Muriel's manner to her all through that afternoon; and

Mrs. Carruthers kissed her forehead with motherly affection, and told her that Mrs. Lindsay must soon spare her to them for another visit.

Mag did not generally bestow long upon her toilet, but this evening she lingered over it unconsciously. She knew that she was pretty, and she longed to look her fairest in the eyes of the man she loved. Her simple wardrobe left her little choice. She wore the same white muslin in which he had seen her first, and now, as then, it was adorned with bunches of the flower which has been called the lover's own.

"Not that he will forget me," murmured the girl to herself. "He promised me he would love me while life lasted, and he is so good and true he could not break his word."

It was late when she entered the dining-room, and dinner had already been announced. One hurried glance round the room told her that Sir Hugh was not there; but he was so much one of themselves, that the Carruthers stood on no ceremony with him, and dinner commenced without him.

It was nearly over when he made his appearance. His seat was very far from Mag's, and an epaulette of flowers quite prevented her seeing him, but she knew by instinct that he was there. He seemed more silent and abstracted than usual. She hardly heard his voice. When Mrs. Carruthers gave the signal to retire he never once raised his eyes.

Mag did not go to the drawing-room with the other ladies, but went at once to the library. This was Mr. Carruthers' favourite room, but he never entered it after dinner; indeed, it was so little used of an evening that the gas was rarely lighted. Just now, however, the apartment was bright enough, for, owing to the damp inclement weather, a fire had been kept up all day, and was still blazing cheerfully on the hearth.

Mag drew an easy-chair up and sank wearily into it. She made a pretty picture as she sat there, a slender white-robed figure, her fair hair contrasting well with the carved back of the oaken chair, black with the age of centuries. The firelight shone on the creamy delicacy of her skin, and lighted up her clear grey eyes. As she sat there she might have been taken for the emblem of purity, innocence, and truth.

The door opened noiselessly, a man's footstep was hardly heard on the thick pile of the carpet. Mag looked up suddenly and saw her lover watching her with a strange, stern, set look upon his handsome face. She rose and laid one hand upon his arm, but he did not take her into his embrace, he did not even return her caress; he stood there still, motionless, looking at her as though he would read her very soul.

"Are you not pleased to see me, Hugh?" she whispered, a sick, faint fear at her heart. "I wish I had never seen you," he cried, passionately. "I wish I had been dead before I saw your fair, false face; you are the most treacherous, heartless coquette the world ever produced. You know my miserable story, how much I had already suffered at a woman's hands. You might have spared me, and have selected some happier, younger man to weave your spells around."

She tried to speak, but she could not force her trembling lips to do her bidding.

"Have you nothing to say?" he cried, fiercely, "no excuse to offer, no explanation to give? It wouldn't be true, of course; but I daresay I should be fool enough to believe it. What chance has a man's judgment against such a face as yours?"

"Some one has maligned me cruelly," she said at last, "or you would never judge me so harshly, Hugh."

"No one has maligned you, no one has mentioned your name to me; it would have made no difference if they had. I was so infatuated that I should have believed nothing less than the evidences of my own senses. If the dearest friend I have in the world had told me this thing of you I should have disbelieved him and quarrelled with him for his pains."

"What thing?" asked Mag, slowly. "At least let me know what has changed you so?"

He took from his pocket an envelope, the very envelope she had directed so joyfully to him; he drew from it two sheets of paper, one was her own note to him. But hope died within her heart as she recognized in the other John Tempest's last letter.

"Do you remember its contents, or would you like me to read it to you?" asked Sir Hugh, cuttingly. "Yesterday you did me the honour to accept my hand; that very morning you must have received this letter, in which the writer speaks of the home he is preparing for you, and hopes you will consent to be his wife before Christmas."

There was a long silence; you might have heard a pin drop; there was no movement in the room, only that Mag leant against the table to steady her trembling limbs.

"Well," said Sir Hugh, hoarsely, "aren't you going to speak. I should think you owed me an explanation; have you nothing to say?"

"You will not believe me."

"Probably not; but I should like to hear what you have to say. I suppose I am not wrong in my statement that this gentleman (I was not dishonourable enough to finish reading his letter, so I do not know his name) is engaged to you."

"He is engaged to me."

"Poor devil."

"He does not need your pity," said Mag, simply. "He loves me very much."

"And you love him? Bah! a coquette like you doesn't know the meaning of the word."

"You are very cruel to me."

"Think of the wrong you have wrought me."

"Will you listen to me?" she said, speaking with feverish eagerness. "Will you let me tell you everything, and not judge me till I have finished?"

"I am listening."

"It was only one week before I came here that he—Jack I mean—asked me to marry him. I had not seen him half-a-dozen times, and I had no idea he cared for me. It took me quite by surprise."

"But you accepted him," put in Sir Hugh, jealously.

"I refused him at first. I told him that I did not love him, that I thought I never should love anyone."

"I quite agree with you," sarcastically.

"He told me that did not matter," said poor Mag, simply; "he said love would come in time, and I knew papa and mamma would be pleased; so I told him if he quite understood I did not love him we would be engaged."

It was impossible to read Sir Hugh's opinion in his face, for it remained motionless.

"Do you believe me?" she asked in a kind of hoarse voice.

"No," he said, slowly, "I do not."

"I have told you the truth, indeed I have."

He smiled.

"I doubt if you know what truth is."

"Why won't you believe me?"

"There is a flaw in your argument," he said, deliberately. "According to your account you are so soft-hearted that you find it impossible to say no to your admirers. You accepted Mr. —ahem! Jack—because he proposed to you a month ago; you accepted me yesterday for the same reason; a week hence you will probably accept Egerton, and so the number of your engagements will go on, swelling rapidly."

"Oh! you are cruel, heartless!"

"I think not," he answered. "I only judge you by your own reasoning."

"You know quite well I should never have accepted Captain Egerton. If I had not seen you I might have learnt to love Jack in time; at any rate, I should have married him and made the best of my life."

"As you will probably do now."

"Hugh!" reproachfully.

"I am not a vain man. I cannot pretend to imagine I have excited in your heart a feeling any stronger than that you confessed you felt for my rival. I may have other attractions."

"What do you mean?"

"That you are not insensible to the power of your own beauty, and are quite prepared to dispose of that beauty as advantageously as possible."

The girl looked at him steadily with her clear grey eyes.

"And you believe I accepted you for your money? That I would throw over Jack for you because you were richer?"

"I am not conceited enough to imagine anything else. Jack gives place to me; I, in time, should have to resign my pretensions in favour of a duke?"

They stood there face to face; painful as the interview must have been to both neither made any attempt to end it, for both knew that in all probability it was the last time they should ever be so near each other again.

He had said cruel, harsh things to her, but he was her life's love; the sun of her happiness would have set when she was parted from him.

As for Hugh, his love was as strong as hers; his anger bade him put her from him. He deemed her false, faithless, unwomanly, but all the same he loved her; he would go down to his grave so loving her; for her sake no other woman's lips would ever meet his; no little child would ever call him father.

Love and pride struggled in Mag's heart—love conquered.

"Forgive me," she pleaded. "I don't ask you for our engagement to go on. I should not care for that when I had lost your love; but don't let me have the memory of your angry words to haunt me. Oh! Hugh, forgive me, and say something kind to me before I go."

"I cannot."

"Will not," she corrected.

"No, cannot. I am not so versed in deception as Miss Lindsay. I don't forgive you, and I never shall; the only pity I have is for the man you have duped, whose heart may some day ache as bitterly through you as mine does now."

She saw it was all in vain. She moved towards the door, but ere she reached it the thought of her bitter heartache of the black despair which lay before her made her pause. Sir Hugh was standing still where she had left him.

In another instant she was at his side, her arms were round his neck.

"Oh, my darling," she sobbed, "I love you; you may not believe me, but it is the truth. Kiss me once, my love, before I go out into the exile to which you have sent me."

He was touched at the appeal; those soft, clinging arms moved him as nothing else could have done; but Sir Hugh Ainslie was not a man to be lightly moved from his purpose.

Very gently he disengaged himself from that close embrace, and without a word left the room, while Mag Lindsay, in all the glory of her youthful beauty, with the autumn firelight shining on her hair and turning it to threads of gold, threw herself wearily into a chair, and prayed, as perhaps in her short life she had never prayed before, that the Heaven she had sinned against would in its great mercy deem her suffering sufficient punishment for her offence, and take her to itself.

She was so tired, so utterly tired of the world and its struggles. She had nothing to look forward to in the whole future; she had made such a wretched failure of her life that at nineteen she prayed for death.

But all our prayers are not answered, happily for us, and Mag Lindsay lived to be thankful that hers was not granted her.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW FRIEND.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed."—Old Proverb.

Far away from Carruthers Castle and its pleasant hospitality—far away from Sir Hugh's luxurious home, back to the bustling South London suburb, back to the narrow Brixton street where Mag Lindsay lived.

The little parlour was just the same as when we saw it first, save that the carpet was more threadbare, the furniture a little shabbier, and the curtains more faded. The summer sunshine no longer streamed in through the white blinds, for dreary November had come. Above, the sky was of a dull leaden hue; below, the pavements were greasy with muddiness, and the rain fell with steady force as though it never meant to stop. Mrs. Lindsay and Mag sat just where we saw them first, intent on the big mending-basket, but they were more changed than their surroundings, for one wore a widow's cap, and the other's face seemed to have grown more sorrowful than even her black dress could explain.

The husband and father, the painstaking teacher and the persevering coach, had gone to his rest. He died in harness without even a day's illness. Returning from some lessons late in the evening he complained of faintness, and Mag went to make him a cup of tea; before she returned he was dead. They had known for years that he suffered from heart disease, but had never expected such a terrible ending as this. With his life all the brightness and cheerfulness had gone from the little household. They had been poor before, but never so poor as now. They had been a singularly united family, but from the moment of Mag's return from Carruthers Castle all this was changed. The day after she came home she had a private interview with Dr. Tempest. What passed at it no one ever quite knew; but the young physician called on Mr. and Mrs. Lindsay and told them the engagement was at an end. It was not Mag's fault; they must not think of blaming her; he ought not to have taken advantage of her youth and inexperience to fetter her by a promise.

The young man behaved very nobly, screening his pretty, wilful darling as much as possible. Mr. Lindsay never said a word of blame to his daughter. In his eyes she could do no wrong, but it was hardly to be expected his wife should share this opinion. She had been a very loving step-mother, and had done her duty by the girl thoroughly, but she never lost sight of the fact that, as Mrs. Tempest, Mag would not only have been off her father's hands herself, but have been able to render considerable pecuniary assistance to the whole family.

Even before her husband's death Mrs. Lindsay had spoken her mind pretty plainly. She spoke it even more so when she was left a widow. Mag's folly and ingratitude were her favourite themes of conversation.

"I can't imagine what you do want," she was saying on this particular November afternoon. "Dr. Tempest is clever, rich, and handsome. He fairly worships the ground you walk on. You would have had an easeful home and a devoted husband."

"Please do not speak of it, mamma."

"But I must speak of it, Magdalen, it is my duty."

Mag started; never had anyone in her life before addressed her by that name, which had been her fair young mother's.

Mrs. Lindsay went on. "Your poor father left little enough behind him, I am sure. It's unreasonable to expect I should rob my own children to support a wilful girl in her folly."

Mag rose abruptly from her seat; indignation flashing from her grey eyes.

"You have said enough," she cried. "I never believed my father's wife could grudge me a share of his home; but now I know it, I will relieve you of my presence at once; I will never break bread in this house again."

"Then I fear, my dear, that you will run the risk of not breaking it at all."

Her step-daughter went upstairs. Half-an-hour later she left the house, a small black bag in her hand. Mrs. Lindsay paid no attention; she affected to treat the whole affair as a childish freak.

The November day was over, the street lamps were lighted and few people were abroad in the muddy streets. Mag trudged on patiently, a great sorrow at her heart, a

bitter longing that she could end life's fitful fever and be at rest. But she never thought of taking her life herself; weak and erring as you may have deemed her, she was yet too brave for suicide's fate. Besides, in Heaven her loving father and the mother whose days had ended when hers began were waiting for her. Could she disappoint them of their child?

So the girl plodded wearily on, till at last she reached the pleasant suburb of Denmark Hill and stopped before a handsome house standing in its own grounds. She pushed one of the gates open and walked up the drive; for one instant she hesitated, then she gave a trembling knock.

Had she so willed it this might have been her home; the many servants who kept order here would have owned her as their mistress; now she was a weary fugitive with no place to lay her head.

"Is your master at home?"

The page thought nothing of the unexpected arrival; doctor's servants get used to seeing strange faces at all sorts of odd times. The boy showed her into the consulting-room. Another moment and John Tempest stood before her. They had never met since the day he learnt that all his hopes were vain—that his darling had given her heart into another's keeping. He knew Mr. Lindsay was dead, but another doctor had been called in on that occasion, and he had no idea of the bitter poverty in which the family had been left. His one feeling at seeing his visitor was unqualified surprise.

"Mag!"

"Jack!"

That was all—only those two words, but oh! what a world was expressed in them. By that one utterance he told her that he had no higher pleasure than to serve her; by that one pleading cry she expressed that he was her only friend.

"I wonder you don't spurn me," she said, with a sob in her voice. I have wronged you bitterly, and yet I venture to come and ask your help."

"You never wronged me," said Jack, tenderly; "from the first you told me you had no love to give me. Can I blame you that another won what was denied to me? I only wish I could see you happy."

"You will never do that," said the girl, frankly.

"I cannot understand," said Jack, "how any man who has your love can keep away from you."

"Do not talk of him," breathed the girl gently. "Jack, I have left home. Mamma does not want me any longer, and I am going to seek my fortune."

He stared in blank dismay.

"You mustn't, dear, it would never do. You are so young and tender, and so pretty, Mag; home is the only place for you."

"But you see I have no home now papa is gone."

Her complete calmness restored his self-command as nothing else could have done.

"But what do you propose to do?"

"I have not the remotest idea; I thought you would tell me that," she said, reproachfully.

Jack paused; he had never expected this; he knew about as little of the channels of female industry as it was possible to know. At last a bright idea struck him.

"You must have some relations, Mag; why don't you go and stay with them till things get right?"

Mag started in surprise. Here was a suggestion she had not expected.

"Things never will come right," she said, a little impatiently, "and I don't think I have any relations. I am sure papa had none."

"But your mother," hazarded Jack, "your own mother I mean, not the present Mrs. Lindsay?"

Her face cleared.

"How strange, I never thought of it. Mamma must have had some relations, for papa told me

once that when she died they offered to adopt me, only he could not spare me."

"Then we have solved the problem, Mag," said Jack, with a brave effort at cheerfulness. "Of course you remember your mother's name."

"Oh yes, I was christened after her, Magdalen De la Torre. Mamma came from Kent, I think, because in some old books we have there is the address of a house in Kent."

Jack poked the fire vigorously.

"Do you know, Mag, I think you are going to turn out a great lady. There is only one family of De la Torre's in England that I ever heard of. Lord De la Torre is one of my patients; he must be your grandfather."

"I don't think so," said Mag, reflectively. "I don't think I can be a lord's grand-daughter."

"We will soon find out."

"How?"

"The earl is staying in London at his town house; I will take you there at once."

"Oh, Jack, I can't, it is so late, and I am tired."

"Dear," he said, persuasively, "I am afraid you must; had you not told me this idea about your parentage I must have found you some temporary home; no home can be fitter than your grandfather's."

"I thought you would let me stay here, Jack; at least, for a little while."

His cheek flushed hotly.

"That could not be; there is no lady to receive you, and it would not do for you to visit at the house whose mistress you were to have been."

He rang the bell for tea, which, in common with many men, he believed to be the great panacea for feminine troubles.

He gave orders for the brougham to be got ready at once, and in a quarter of an hour he and Magdalen were speeding along to Grosvenor-gardens as fast as two fleet horses could take them.

John Tempest left Mag in the brougham, and went alone up the long flight of steps.

The butler looked astonished at his arrival, but, like a well-bred domestic, expressed no surprise.

It was by this time getting late, but the earl was at home his servants declared, and the young physician soon found himself in his presence.

He had often been pressed to visit his noble patient, but this was the first time he had ever crossed the threshold in a non professional capacity.

"Ah, Tempest," said the old lord, kindly, rising to greet him, "I am glad to see you; to what lucky chance do I owe your visit?"

"To a very strange one, my lord. Will you pardon me if I ask questions you may deem inquisitive? Indeed, indeed, it is not idle curiosity that prompts them."

"Doctors are privileged persons," said the earl, pleasantly; "ask away, I'll answer if I can."

"Did you ever know a gentleman of the name of Lindsay, a man of five or six-and-forty, who took his degree at Oxford?"

"I knew him only too well," returned Lord de la Torre, "seeing he robbed me of my only child. She was beautiful, and I wanted her to make a grand match. I was bitterly disappointed when she eloped with a needy tutor; but the man was of gentle blood, and I had liked him well. I never meant to keep up my displeasure, only while I was thinking of how to forgive them without humbling my pride too much death robbed Lindsay of the treasure he had stolen from me. My Magdalen died within ten months of her wedding-day."

"But she left a child, Lord de la Torre. That child is now waiting in my brougham. Her father is dead, her stepmother grudges her a share of the home that was his, and so she came to me as the only friend she had for counsel and advice. She told me her mother had been Miss de la Torre, and I came here to-night to see if by any chance that mother was your child, and if, in that case, for

her sake you would offer a place in your heart to her daughter."

"I shall bless you till my dying day," said the earl, simply; "I always wanted Magdalen's little girl, only her father would not be persuaded to part from her."

"She is not quite a little girl, my lord. Remember, it is more than twenty years since you lost your daughter."

"Tempest," said the old man a little sadly, "I think I understand. You are only lending me my grandchild for a time. Very soon she will be your wife, and leave me as lonely as ever."

"She will never be my wife," returned Jack, gravely. "It was the dearest wish of my heart, but it was in vain. Mag will never be nearer to me than she is now; but because I love her, because I wanted her for my own, I felt my house was no fit home for her, even for a single night; and so, late as it was, I brought her here to leave her in your care."

The earl wrung his hand.

"Let me see her," he said brokenly. "I hope there is some resemblance to her mother in her face."

"I think there must be; she bears no likeness to her father, and she was his darling."

Another moment and the girl was before them, her beautiful face unshaded by her small black hat, her bright hair shining in the lamplight. Her grandfather clasped her in his arms.

"This is your home henceforward, dear," he said, fondly. "Tempest, I could fancy the years had rolled back and my Magdalen herself stood before me."

CHAPTER V.

FAITHFUL.

"No, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,
But as truly loves on till the close,
As the sunflower turns to her god when he sets,
The same look she turned when he rose."
MOORE.

MEANWHILE Sir Hugh Ainslie was travelling in foreign climes, trying hard what absence and change of scene would do towards making him forget the fair false siren who had been his second love.

Alas! he found it a difficult task. He took a European tour, he penetrated into the heart of Russia, and wandered among the vineyards of Spain; but in the far north and the sunny south the same face haunted him, the face of a girl with grey eyes and soft auburn hair, who wore a childish muslin frock decorated only with blue forget-me-nots.

"What a fool I am," thought the baronet, angrily. "She deceived me from first to last; she is not worth a single regret, and yet I can feel it in my heart to envy 'Jack' in his blindness. He at least has her beautiful face at his side, and I daresay he never suspects how false and treacherous are its smiles."

A very warm invitation reached him from Carruthers Castle to come down and attend the double wedding, but he resolutely refused. He could not bear just yet to see the place where he had been so happy, and had dreamed the lovedream from which he had had such a rude awakening. He heard afterwards from Charley Egerton (who was best man to his brother) that Muriel and her sister made charming brides, and the double ceremony went off with great *clat*.

"And you flirted with the bridesmaids, of course. You need not tell me to the contrary, for I shall not believe you."

"I never flirt now," said the captain, very disconsolately.

"And a good thing too. Pray what has made you give up the obnoxious habit?"

"Hang it all, Ainslie, you know."

"I'm sure I don't."

"When a man's been pretty badly hit with a real attachment he doesn't care much about playing at love."

"And who is the lady?"

"I suppose you can guess."

"I think so. So she refused you. Well, I don't think she is worth many regrets."

"I won't hear a word against her," cried the young officer hotly. "She was the sweetest, purest creature Heaven ever made."

"And she refused you."

"I never asked her, never had the chance. She actually left the Castle without saying good-bye to me."

"And you started in hot pursuit."

"I did nothing of the kind. It was a long time before I could find her address. At last I got it from Muriel (she's my sister now, you see, and a capital girl she is). She'd always guessed I cared for Mag. She gave me a little note to take by way of introduction to the family when I presented myself."

"How considerate."

Charley never saw the sneer.

"But it was of no use."

"She wouldn't have you."

"She was not there."

"Married," an insane hatred of "Jack" rising in his breast at the idea.

"No; she had disappeared."

"Nonsense, Charley; girls don't disappear now-a-days. The idea's preposterous."

"So I told the mother—she's not half a bad sort of woman—but she stuck to the story. It seems the father died in the early autumn, and Mag never got over his loss. She was always grieving and pining, till one November afternoon she disappeared, and no one has seen or heard of her since."

Pleasant this to hear for the man who had loved her as his own life, who, in spite of her fastness—Heaven help him!—loved her still, and would continue to even to his life's end.

"You must be mistaken."

The other shook his head.

"I am quite sure."

It was March then, a bright clear day in early spring, and the conversation took place at an hotel in Paris. Hugh's next movement was to have been a tour in the south of France, but Egerton's news had too thoroughly upset him. True Mag Lindsay was now nothing to him—less than nothing—but, all the same, he could not bear to think of those grey eyes and picture their owner a lonely wanderer upon the face of the earth—an exile from all that was good and pleasant, and she almost a child.

He gave up his trip and hastened to London as fast as boat and rail would take him. Why he returned to his native land he could not have explained, he certainly had no right to search for Mag, that duty belonged to the man who possessed her love, the honest fellow whose love letter she had enclosed by mistake in her note to himself. Sir Hugh had drawn many fancy pictures of "Jack." He generally fancied him a much depressed city clerk, with an income of about eighty pounds yearly—that he was a physician, young, handsome, with a large practice, and an ample private fortune at his disposal, he never even dreamed.

He went to London, and the first person he visited was his old friend Muriel, now Lady Egerton. Of her own accord she mentioned Miss Lindsay, and openly regretted her extraordinary disappearance.

"I wanted Mag for a sister," said the bride, blushing prettily, "I have known poor Charley's secret for a long time."

Sir Hugh left abruptly, there was nothing to be gained by lingering there; clearly Lady Egerton knew nothing more than she had told him. His next step was to call upon Mrs. Lindsay; that enterprising widow had now started a day-school, and there was not a morning but she regretted the loss of Mag, whose services would have been invaluable to her now.

She was a little surprised at this second applicant for her step-daughter's address, but she told him much the same tale she had told to Charles Egerton, only in this case the listener interrupted her with many questions.

"Your opinion is then, madam, that, moved to frenzy by her father's death, Miss Lindsay laid violent hands on her own life."

"I think so."

"It is a strange fancy to take up."

"I think it is a most natural one."

"Why?"

"It is four months turned since she went away. Poor Mag was a gentle, fragile girl, the last creature in the world to make her way alone; if she had been alive we must have heard something of her in all this time."

Hugh sighed; he owned to himself that the widow had at least reason on her side.

"Had she any friends?"

Mrs. Lindsay shook her head.

"She held herself too high to be a favourite in this neighbourhood. Mag was much too proud—it was her great fault."

He hesitated.

"I had heard that Miss Lindsay was engaged, surely her future husband has some clue to her whereabouts."

"The engagement was broken off months before she disappeared."

"Really?"

"Yes; in her poor father's lifetime, early in September. It was the worst piece of folly she ever did in her life. Perhaps, though, poor child, she's lived to be sorry for it."

"It was a good match."

"It was a match far beyond what Mag had any right to expect."

"Indeed!"

"A young physician, handsome, agreeable, and clever, with a large practice and an enormous private fortune, Mag would have had her open carriage and her brougham, her footman and her own maid. I often hope, Sir Hugh, my children won't be so blind to their own advantage when they grow up."

Sir Hugh went away with a strange hope at his breast. After all she was less than he deemed her. Mag had profited little by what he called her treachery. Her first act on coming home had been to dismiss her lover—a lover who would have gratified her every ambition.

"It looks as if, she had loved me after all," thought Hugh, "as if it was sheer love and not my fortune which tempted her to forget the chain which bound her."

He turned into his club. April was far advanced by this time, and London largely filling. He met many men he knew, and one and all asked him the same question—had he seen the new beauty?

"I'm sick of beauties," said Sir Hugh, crossly; "one and all, they're just alike."

"But Miss De la Torre is quite out of the usual style—a most uncommon beauty."

"Golden hair and grey eyes, that's the fashion now, I believe?"

"Hem! you're a little out; anyway, she's the favourite of the season."

"I thought the earl had no daughters."

"This is his grandchild and heiress. Even if she were plain Magdalen De la Torre she would have dozens of suitors. As it is—"

"As it is, she can choose whose heart she'll break. How old is she?"

"Nineteen or twenty; her fortune is fifty thousand on her wedding-day, and the estates with their revenues must come to her soon; the earl's seventy if he's a day."

"Are you thinking of trying your luck?"

"I would to-morrow if I saw any chance, and I'd say the same if she was penniless. You go and see her, Ainslie, and you'll confess London has seen nothing like her this many a day."

But Sir Hugh does not take the advice, his thoughts are all very much engaged with that other girl whose age is so near that of Miss De la Torre, and whose fate is so cruelly different.

One day in June, when the summer sunshine was at its brightest, he went to a flower-show and garden fête given for some charity in the picturesque grounds of a royal duke, and after looking at the roses he strolled off into the remotest walks where the crowd was not so great. Sir Hugh wandered on until he had strayed quite into the deserted portion of the grounds where nothing reminded him of the gay scene he had left.

And there as he stood idly gazing at a lake whose waters were beautified by large white lilies, two voices fell on his ear; he stooped, impelled to listen, for one touched his heart to

the very core, it was the tone he had never hoped to hear again.

"Yes, I am very happy, Jack."

"And you have forgotten the past?"

"I shall never quite forget it, dear," she answered gently, "but it does not pain me now: at times my old sorrow wakes and cries, but I am not miserable; everyone has their trouble, Jack, and many have a heavier one than mine."

They came in view then, Mag Lindsay a little paler, a little older than when he saw her last, and a tall handsome man, a husband surely of whom any girl might have been proud; he placed a chair for her by the water's edge and went away. Sir Hugh stood irresolute, in spite of Mrs. Lindsay's story of the broken engagement; seeing them together thus he believed nothing more than that they were husband and wife. Should he make himself known or go away without her discovering his presence?

After all the choice was taken out of his hands. Mag rose from her seat, and walking to the edge of the lake stretched out her hand to gather some of the beautiful water-lilies which grew on its banks; her foot slipped, another moment and she would have been in the water, but that Hugh's arms were round her, and almost before she realized her danger she was once more in safety.

She looked up to thank her preserver, then their eyes met, a crimson blush coloured her cheek. He was pale as death, she was his life's love, and it had been a hard struggle to save her for Jack.

Mag was the first to recover her composure. "I am very glad that we meet again, Sir Hugh. It is nearly a year since we parted. Time has doubtless effaced my image from your fancy. For the sake of the love you bore me once, you will not refuse me your forgiveness. You little know, you will never guess how the memory of your cruel words has haunted me."

"Why should I forgive you?" he asked, bitterly. "You have everything to make you happy; you cannot care for my pardon."

"I do care for it more than anything in the whole world."

"Jack" would not like to hear you say so—I am obliged to speak of him thus, I do not know his other name."

"You mean Dr. Tempest."

"Ah, it was he who was with you just now."

"Yes."

"He seems happy enough."

"I think he is happy. I hope so."

"And he knows nothing of the little pastoral you enacted for my benefit at Carruthers Castle?"

"You are very cruel," said the girl, sadly. "I see it is vain to ask for your forgiveness if you have such thoughts of me as that."

"Does he know?"

"Of course. I told him the day of my return."

"And he married you in spite of it. His love must be of a peculiarly generous nature."

"It is; but for all that he did not marry me."

Jack and I are true friends, Sir Hugh. We never shall be—we shall never seek to be anything else."

"You used to call me Hugh."

"That was under very different circumstances."

"Mag!"

"Yes."

"I have said very cruel things to you."

"Perhaps you had the right," she said, wearily. "I daresay I appeared very vain and heartless to you, but I think you might have forgiven me in all these months."

"I will forgive you on one condition."

"I hope it is not a hard one," with almost a touch of her old arrogance.

"It is in your power."

"Tell me what it is."

"I want you to let things be as they were that day in the wood. Mag it is such hard work living without you that I want you back."

She shook her head.

"You refuse me?"

"Yes."

"Then you never loved me."

"I loved you so well that the loss of you almost broke my heart."

"Then why not accept me now?"

"I am afraid."

"Of what?"

"You said once I cared for your rank and wealth, not for yourself."

"I never meant it darling; I was mad with anger, or I never could have said such a thing."

"If we were married and you said it again—or even thought it—I should know directly if the idea crossed your mind—it would kill me, just as surely as if you stabbed me to the heart."

"Trust me," he pleaded. "Mag, we have both something to forgive. Darling, let us begin afresh and trust each other entirely."

She loved him—loved him just as she had done long ago at Carruthers Castle. She had a proud spirit, but her love was stronger than her pride. She put her hand into his and let him draw her brown head home to its true resting-place once more.

"We will be married at once," decided Sir Hugh. "Now your poor father is dead there is no one we need to consult."

"Yes," said Mag, blushing; "there is grandpapa."

"Is he here to-day? Will you introduce me to him?"

"He is here, but I don't think I need introduce you to him, he knows you quite well. You can't think, Hugh, how I have had to manoeuvre to prevent his inviting you to dinner since you came back to England."

"And you didn't want me! Very polite."

"I didn't want to see you first in a crowd; I could not have borne to touch your hand until you had forgiven me."

"The water-lilies were our best friends, after all. Mag, will you take me to Mr. Lindsay?"

"To grandpapa," she corrected; "yes."

"Isn't his name Lindsay?"

She shook her head.

"What is it, then?"

"Can't you guess?"

"How can I?"

"He is someone you know very well. I fancy he is your godfather."

Sir Hugh started.

"You cannot mean the Earl de la Torre?"

"I'm afraid I do. Mamma was his only child. Jack found him out for me soon after papa died, and I have been just like his own daughter ever since."

"You will be accusing me of mercenary motives now," he said, gravely. "My darling, don't you know you are one of the richest heiresses in England?"

"I don't care," she said, demurely, "so that you don't give me up."

He had no intention of doing that.

They had a grand wedding at St. George's, Hanover-square, and after a brief honeymoon they came home to Lord de la Torre. He had pleaded so hard not to lose his darling that Hugh had yielded the point, and for the few years he lingered Mag made the sunshine of his life.

After that, when she was Countess de la Torre, she and her husband divided their time between Ainslie and her own estates; but wherever they were, at all times and seasons, they had no more welcome guest than Lady Egerton, once Muriel Carruthers.

The two are really happy. Sir Hugh adores his wife with a deep, passionate love.

She may have been wayward once, but she is still, and ever will be, winning, and she is devoted to her husband.

She had been Lady Ainslie four years when, to her great delight, Charles Egerton married her half-sister—a girl who had something of Mag about her face, though she lacked the delicate, patrician loveliness of the De la Torres.

For Dr. Tempest—Jack, as he is still called both by May and her husband—he is still faithful to his first love, but he is young still, very young for his years, and there is a child

growing up in the Ainslie nursery with grey eyes and auburn hair, who can already mould him in most things to her will.

The mother looks on with pleased devotion to her first-born; and the fanciest day will come when that child will fill the place once meant for her—a place she herself refused to occupy because no lot, however fair, had charms for her to compare to those of being HUGH AINSLIE'S LOVE.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

THE man over-bored was an editor.

Age is venerable in man, and would be in woman—if ever she became old.

What holds all the snuff in the world?—No one nose.

A DIFFICULT lock to pick.—One from a bald head.

It is all very well to say that a man was hanged on a legal technicality, but the rope usually has something to do with it.

THE last new bonnet is to be distinguished from the old one by a much higher crown—and price.

"He's grown to be a polished gentleman, anyhow," said an old lady, gazing fondly at the spout at the shining bald head of her son, just returned after a long absence.

A FRIEND asked a gourmand: "What kind of dinners sit the hardest on your stomach?"

"Those to which I am not invited," answered the bon vivant.

"It is well to leave something for those who come after us," as a man said who threw a barrel in the way of a constable who was chasing him.

"When a young lady asked to look at a parasol, the young man said, 'Will you please give the shade you want?' 'I expect the parasol to give the shade I want,' said the young lady.

THE Egyptian war gave about a hundred paragraphs the opportunity to say that the Bedouins are no great Shells, and that no matter how they are treated, they will always be-do-in something atrocious and inexcusable. War is, indeed, a great evil.

A PHYSICIAN, on presenting his bill to the executor of the will of the deceased patient, asked, "Do you wish to have my bill sworn?"

"No," replied the executor; "the death of the deceased is sufficient evidence that you attended him professionally."

THE obliging visitor, to show that he is really fond of children, and that the dear little one is not annoying him in the least, treats the kid to a ride upon his knee. "That is true! That is true!" How do you like that, my boy? Is that nice?"

"Yes, sir," replies the child; "but not so nice as on the real donkey, the one with four legs."

IN a church, the other day, the large congregation were devoutly kneeling in prayer, when an irreverent joker quite audibly whispered, "Here comes an Eastern detective." In seventeen seconds all of that congregation except the chief elder had slid through the windows.

"TALK about stopping the drinking habits of the people!" exclaimed the lecturer; "there is but one way to do it. You must remove the cause." "True for you, ol' fell!" shouted a demoralised hearer; "true for you! That's what I've been trying to do all my life. Bring on yer cause if you want it removed!"

CONVERSATION between two castle builders in humble life:—"If I were passing along the street and found a package with a million pounds in it, I know what I'd do. I'd keep it!" "I would, too, if I were sure that it belonged to some rich person who wouldn't be likely to suffer for the want of it; but if I wasn't certain, I'd take it to the police station, in case it might belong to some poor man."

SOCIETY.

There is a rumour that Mr. Wood, to whom is due the success of the fancy fair at the Royal Albert Hall, has in contemplation a scheme which will astonish London society more completely than anything that has yet been attempted.

The marriage of Mr. Ralph Creyke, M.P. for York, with Miss Frances Elizabeth Bacon, eldest surviving daughter of the late Sir Henry H. Bacon, premier baronet, and sister of the present holder of the title, was solemnized at Gainsborough parish church recently. The bride's family possess large estates in Lincolnshire and Norfolk, and the Creyke family are large landed proprietors in Yorkshire. Canon Williams officiated. The bride wore a white stamped velvet bodice trimmed with white duchesse expoint lace, and underskirt of white satin, handsomely adorned, and a tulle veil, fastened with diamond ornaments.

A CORRESPONDENT gives one or two interesting facts with reference to the violins used by the Duke of Edinburgh. One of these violins is a splendid instrument given to his Royal Highness by the Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who inherited it from the father of Prince Albert. The other, which also possesses some very fine qualities, was presented to the Duke of Edinburgh by the late Emperor of Russia. The Prince makes these two instruments his invariable companions in all his travels. They have been all round the world with him, and as such details are interesting, if not important, it may be added that they are carried in a rosewood box, covered by a quilted piece of blue satin, the work of the Duchess of Edinburgh.

There was a masked and fancy dress ball held the other night in Kensington. At midnight two policemen called, and said the company must separate. "Not at all," said the host; "this is a private house." "Very well, sir," said one of the policemen, "here are my orders, and I must take the names of all who are present." "Do so," responded the host. The policemen went to work and put down all the names, making everybody feel supremely uncomfortable. Directly they had done so, one of them walked up to the table and poured himself out a glass of champagne. "What right have you to drink my wine?" roared the host. "I supposed, when I was invited," responded the policeman, "that refreshments were included;" and, amidst a roar of laughter, he showed his card. Both the men were simply guests.

SIR THOMAS and Lady Brassey, before leaving Normanton to spend some months in the Mediterranean on board the *Sunderland*, entertained a large party of friends, the party only breaking up at the end of last December, when Sir Thomas, Lady Brassey, and family started via Paris for Marseilles. On the 20th ult. a ball was given, to which all the neighbourhood were invited, and dancing began soon after ten o'clock, and was kept up to a very late hour. The toilettes worn were remarkably pretty. Lady Brassey wore a dress of coral tulle, the skirt trimmed with very fine old Venetian point and velvet begonia leaves; the bodice was of the richest satin, the pattern being woven in begonia leaves. Lady Napier, dress of red satin, trimmed with black lace. Hon. Mrs. Lawrence, a white tulle dress spotted with silver. Hon. Miss Lawrence, brown tulle dress trimmed with cherries. Mrs. Moncreiffe, white satin and lace. Miss Ewart, white tulle skirt, deep crimson velvet bodice. Miss Armistage, black tulle dress with variegated holly and berries. Miss Brassey, white Indian muslin and satin. Miss Bernal, black tulle trimmed with holly. Miss Shaw, skirt of white lace, with bodice of terra cotta satin. A most recherché supper was served in the dining-room. On the following evening, a children's dance was given.

STATISTICS.

A NEW INDUSTRY.—An important agricultural and manufacturing industry is about to develop in the Western States of America, which, it is believed, will not only add millions to the wealth of the people, but save millions which are now spent abroad. The industry is that of cultivating flax and utilizing the fibre. The area planted to flax in the Western States in 1881 was 1,127,300 acres, divided as follows:—Iowa, 287,400; Indiana, 193,400; Kansas, 160,900; Illinois, 160,300; Minnesota, 95,200; Ohio, 80,600; Missouri, 55,000; Nebraska, 50,000; and Wisconsin, 44,500. Yet upon all this area no merchantable flax fibre was produced, the flax being burned or allowed to rot. The yield of seed was about 8,000,000 bushels, valued at about eight millions of dollars. The total acreage of flax in Europe, where the fibre is utilized, amounted in 1880 to 3,334,329, and the value of the fibre produced to 103,408,000 dollars. The average money yield per acre in flax-seed, therefore, in the Western States was only about seven dollars, as against an average yield in Europe for fibre alone of thirty-two dollars. Belgium, on an area one-eighth as great as that given to flax in the Western American States, annually produces 1,000,000 dollars more; and France, with one seventh of the area, produces annually 3,000,000 dollars more.

GEMS.

TRUTH, like the sun, submits to be obscured, but, like the sun, only for a time.

In conversation humour is more than wit, easiness more than knowledge.

The law of politeness should be binding at home as well as abroad.

EXAMPLE is the softest and least invidious way of commanding.

To assist a fallen friend is instinctive with noble natures.

HEALTH is not his that hath it, but his that enjoys it.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LENTILS AND BACON.—Fry an onion cut up into small dice in a little butter, add twice as much fat bacon cut up in the same manner. When the bacon is cooked, add lentils boiled as above, and moisten with a little stock, then put in minced parsley and pepper, and let the whole simmer gently till wanted, adding a little more stock if necessary.

JUGGED HARE.—This may be made with hare only, but the flavour is much improved by cooking some beefsteak with it in the proportion of a pound and a-half to a good-sized hare. In any case about a pound or rather less of fat streaky bacon should be added, cut into small slices. The beef should be cut up into small pieces, and the hare into joints. Flour these well on both sides, and sprinkle with black pepper and a little salt; lay them in alternate layers in a jar that will stand in a large saucepan of cold water. To this add a small onion stuck with six cloves, a very little allspice, and a bunch of sweet herbs tied in muslin. The best pieces of the hare should be at the bottom. Pour into the jar about a pint of cold water, set the saucepan on the fire, and let it stew for about four hours after the water boils. Just before taking up add a tablespoonful of catsup, and half a glass of port wine. The beef and bacon will have almost disappeared, and if preferred, may be quite removed by straining the gravy over the hare, after having nicely arranged the several joints on the dish in which it is to be served; care must be taken to keep it very hot while straining.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE GROWTH OF CHILDREN.—Growth varies in different children. Some increase in stature so rapidly that their clothes are outgrown long before they are worn threadbare, while others grow very slowly. A table prepared by a French savant gives the following data:—During the first year after birth the growth in stature is about seven and one-half inches; from two to three it is four or five inches; from three to four, an inch and a-half; from four to six, about two and a quarter inches annually; from seven to eight, two and a-half inches; from eight to twelve, two inches annually; from twelve to thirteen, one and eight-tenths; from thirteen to fourteen, two and a quarter inches; from fifteen to sixteen, two inches; from sixteen to seventeen, nearly two inches; and after this, though growth continues until twenty-one, and sometimes for years after, its rate rapidly diminishes. If mothers would measure their children regularly on their birthdays and preserve the record, they would thus accumulate valuable data for statisticians. Progressive increase of stature is a sign of good health, as increase in strides shows weakness of constitution or imperfect health.

CLOTH-OF-GLASS.—It is proposed (says the *Times*) to establish a society to receive gratuitously gifts of clothing of every description of male attire, and to dispose of it at almost nominal prices to deserving persons in poor circumstances. To provide respectable clothing, which is more or less a necessity to large numbers of struggling persons of the clerical class and others, is a heavy tax upon their small earnings. The object of the proposed society is to enable such needy persons, who probably would not stoop to receive charity, to avail themselves at advantageous and low prices of the large amount of clothing little worn of the richer classes, which would otherwise go to waste or be less worthily disposed of. One great advantage of the plan proposed is claimed to be that persons wishing to benefit others in the matter of clothing would thereby offer them a much larger stock to select from than could be at the disposal of any one person. Donors of clothing, so far from losing the power of helping their protégés, would be able to give them orders entitling them to purchase the clothing they require at the society's stores. The society, which it is proposed to call the "Sale and Distribution of Clothing Association," is being started by the Hon. Slingsby Bethell, Chelsea Lodge, Chelsea Embankment, S.W., who will be glad to receive promises of support from all who approve the scheme.

FACE POWDERS.—It is necessary to raise a warning cry against a most mischievous statement which has recently been circulated, and has already done harm, to the effect that "arsenic in small doses is good for the complexion." It is not difficult to imagine the risks women will incur to preserve or improve their "good looks." No more ingenious device for recommending a drug can be hit upon than that which the authors of this most baneful prescription of "arsenic for the complexion" have adopted. Suffice it to recall the fact that for many years past chemists and sanitarians have been labouring to discover means of eliminating the arsenical salts from the colouring matter of wall-papers, and certain dyes once largely used for certain articles of clothing. It is most unfortunate that this hopelessly antagonistic recommendation of arsenic to improve the complexion should have found its way into print. Those who employ the drug as advised—and there are many either already using it or contemplating the rash act—will do so at their peril. So far as they are able, however, it will be the duty of medical men to warn the public against this pernicious practice, which is only too likely to be carried on secretly. It is not without reason that we speak thus pointedly, and urge practitioners to be on the qui vive in anomalous or obscure cases. —Public Opinion.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. N.—A ready way of imitating ground glass is to dissolve Epsom salts in beer, and apply with a brush. It crystallizes when drying.

S. Y.—Shrove Tuesday is the Tuesday after Quinquagesima Sunday, and immediately preceding Ash Wednesday. This festival in 1862 fell on the fourth day of March.

AMY.—Your father could put you in charge of the captain, and your friends would meet you on landing. Travelling great distances is a very simple matter now-a-days.

D. R.—If you desire to cultivate moral courage in your child, then say and do whatever you conscientiously believe to be right and true, without being influenced by the opinions of others, showing him that you fear nothing but failing to fulfil your duty.

I. L.—If a gentleman takes a lady to a place of amusement, or takes her to supper at any place, he will not let her leave the table until he sees that she has had all that she desires to eat, and he will not on any account leave the table until she is ready.

S. N.—There was no impropriety in the gentleman asking the young lady if he might accompany her home; but if there were other young ladies present who were without escorts to accompany them to their homes, Mr. A. should have offered to escort the other two ladies and not overlooked them for the sake of showing attention to one of the number.

A. J.—1. The spoon should be left in the sauceur after it has been used for stirring the tea. 2. The knife and fork should be placed near together and parallel, after having been used. 3. You must address your regrets to the persons who invited you, and send the note as soon as possible after the reception of the invitation.

LULY.—The wash given below for gradually darkening the hair is a favourite among fashionable Parisians: Take of sulphate of iron, 15 to 25 grains; distilled verdigris, 5 to 6 grains; good white wine, quarter imperial pint. Mix together, and perfume with eau de cologne to suit. This mixture will iron-mould linen if allowed to come in contact with it.

CLEOPATRA.—The trial of nuts consists in placing three nuts in the fire, two being named after the girl and her lover, while the third is unchristened. If his nut cracks and jumps, he will prove unfaithful; if it blows and burns, he is true and loyal to her. If both of the named nuts burn together, then it is proof positive that the two will marry in good time.

D. M.—Possibly the young man is not in a position to marry, and therefore hesitates to speak. He does not wish to hamper you with an engagement. You are very young, and it is wise to postpone an engagement for a year. When the young man is ready he will speak. In the meantime try to regard and treat him as a friend. You may meet some one that you will like a great deal better.

FRED N.—A fair cologne water may be made as follows: Alcohol at 50 cts., 10 quarts; dissolve in it essence of neroli petit grain, half an ounce; essence of rosemary 2-3 drams; essence of lavender, 1-4 drams; essence of clove, half a dram; essence of peppermint, half a dram; essence of bergamot, 12-15 drams; lemon, 12-15 drams; essence of Portugal, 7-12 drams; tincture of benzoin, 1-4 drams.

C. S. T.—Stains in marble caused by oil may be removed by applying common clay saturated with benzine. If the grease has remained long enough it will have become acidulated, and may injure the polish, but the above mixture will remove the stain. The surface of the marble may be improved by rubbing or polishing afterwards with fine putty powder and olive oil.

W. U.—Either of the systems of photography referred to will serve your purpose, but we cannot pretend to state which is the better. Both come highly recommended, and both possess features which no other systems published at the present time can equal. It would be safe, therefore, to get either, and as you progress in the art, you may be able to understand which of them is best adapted to your standard of intelligence.

GISEY.—If the gentleman with whom you have been corresponding has ceased writing to you, without, as you state, any cause on your part, and if you have satisfactory proofs that he is not deterred from writing on account of sickness, you can understand by his silence that the correspondence has become irksome. The only course to pursue under such circumstances is never to write to him again on any pretence.

MISSIE.—To remove grease and dirt from cloth, place a piece of blotting paper under the article to be cleaned, then rub upon the spots some pure benzine. After the spot is removed continue to rub with a dry cloth until the benzine is evaporated. The object of putting the blotting paper under the garment is to avoid a circular stain which would otherwise be made. The benzine drives the grease through the cloth, and it is absorbed by the blotting paper.

SYLVIA.—1. In making bran bread, to one quart of bran flour rub in a teaspoonful of salt, and very thoroughly two teaspoonfuls of cream of tartar; then add two scant tablespoonfuls of treacle, and mix in sufficient milk to make a stiff batter. Dissolve one teaspoonful of soda in two tablespoonfuls of cold water, and stir in thoroughly and quickly. Bake slowly one hour. This will keep fresh and moist three days, and is relished by those who cannot eat "bran bread" prepared in other ways. 2. Or, if it be preferred to use yeast, then take a sponge of wheat flour; when it is light, add salt and a small quantity of molasses, stirring in bran flour with a spoon until it is quite stiff. Let it rise, and bake a little longer than the same-sized wheat loaf.

G. H. S.—To make pencil writing or drawing indelible, the following process is recommended:—Lay the writing or drawing in a shallow dish, and pour skimmed milk upon it. Any spots not wet at first may have the milk placed upon them with a feather. When the paper is all wet over with the milk take it up and allow it to drain, and brush off with a feather the drops which collect on the lower edge. Dry it carefully, and it will be found to be perfectly indelible. It cannot be removed even with India-rubber.

E. M. D.—Although generally spoken of as a modern game, croquet seems to be really a modification of the sport with a mallet and ball which was popular in England in the days of Charles II., called pall-mall. This name suggests an Italian origin (*palla*, a ball, and *maglio*, a mallet), but the game was early in vogue in France, and from thence passed to England, probably in the beginning of the seventeenth century. It seems to have gone out of fashion early in the eighteenth century, and who resuscitated it in its modern form, and how it got the name it now bears, are questions which have not been answered.

LIZZIE.—A good housewife will not only prepare her food well, but she will study the wants and needs of her family. It is not enough for her to know how to make the lightest and whitest bread, or never to fail in bringing everything upon the table in the best order, but she must know whether this or that dish is healthful for those who partake of it. No two persons may like the same dish, or partake of it with the same satisfaction or benefit; for while one child may need food to keep it healthy, to another it may be almost rank poison. Good, light, fresh bread may be healthful for one and unhealthy for another; and so it will be with puddings, cakes, pies, &c., which go to make up a plain or luxurious meal.

A WINTER CAROL.

What dost thou here, bright bird,
With that sweet song?
The woods are brown and bare,
The streamlets dark and drear;
The flowers are dead,
And overhead
The swaying boughs are stirred
With plaintive sighs.
Then why dost thou, with tender song,
Wing every fleeting hour along
With notes of summer skies?

"I blithely sing, dear maid,
Because the earth is fair!
On gay and lilting wing
Sweet thoughts of cheer I bring:
The flowers will bloom
When winter's gloom
Has passed beyond the shade
That Time doth throw.
And Love—Immortal Love—reigns here!
What heart can sigh that earth is drear
While youth is fair and joy is near
With balm for every woe?"

M. M.

D. M.—Only two existing species of elephants are certainly known—the Indian and the African—although differences have recently been observed in the elephants of Sumatra, which may perhaps entitle them to be ranked as a distinct species. The Indian elephant is distinguished by a comparatively high oblong head, with a concave forehead; while the African species has a round head, and convex forehead. The ears of the latter are much larger than those of the former, covering the whole shoulder and descending on the legs.

H. A. C.—To polish the piano after having been soiled with the hands of children, or stained and spotted in any manner, rub the part with a little oxalic acid and water by means of a cork till the colour is restored, taking particular care to wash and dry it well afterwards. Then polish with tripoli and a flannel rubber. If the polish of a piano is much injured, it would be advisable to obtain the services of a person who thoroughly understands the art of polishing it, as you might, in your inexperience, do more injury to it than otherwise.

I. G.—In making piecrust, take one quart flour; half pound lard, sweet and firm; half pound butter; one small teacup ice-water. Sift the flour into a deep wooden bowl. With a broad-bladed knife, or a small keen chopper, cut up the lard into the flour until it is as fine as dust. Wet with ice water into a stiff dough, working it with a wooden spoon until obliged to make it into a roll or ball with the hands. Flour these, and knead the paste into shape with as few strokes as will effect your end. Lay the lump upon a floured kneading-board and roll it out into a thin sheet, always rolling from you with a quick, light action. When thin enough, stick bits of butter in regular, close rows all over the sheet, using a knife for this purpose rather than the hands. Roll up the paste into close folds, as you would a sheet of music. Flatten it, so that your rolling-pin can take hold, and roll out again as thin as before. Bake, roll up and then out, until your butter is gone. It is a good plan to sprinkle the inside of each sheet with a little flour after buttering it, before making it into a roll. Finally, make out your crust; butter your pie-plates, lay the paste lightly within them, cut it off evenly about the edges after fitting it neatly; gather up the scraps left from cutting, and make into another sheet. If the pie is to have a top crust, fill the plates with the mince-meat or other fruit, lay the paste on this, cut it to fit, and press down the edges, to prevent the escape of the juice, with a spoon, knife, or jagging-iron, ornamenting it in a regular figure. Bake in a moderate oven until a light brown. Be particularly careful to have the heat as great at the bottom as at the

top, or the lower crust will be clammy and raw. It is well, when you can spare the time, to lay the roll, when all the butter is used up, in a very cold place for fifteen minutes or so before rolling it into crust. Indeed, some good housewives let it stand on the ice an hour in hot weather. They say it tends to make it flaky as well as firm. And touch as little with the hands as may be practicable.

ANNE.—1. If you desire to adhere strictly to fashion, you will only wear rings on the third and fourth fingers—what is called the "little" finger and the wedding finger. 2. An engagement ring should fit and be worn upon the third finger of the right hand. 3. Young ladies ought not to wear more than one or two rings upon the little finger. 4. Single ladies are entitled to wear rings on any finger they please, but fashion does not sanction rings upon the forefinger; they look very awkward, and are really in the way upon the "middle" finger. A profusion of rings in any case is intensely vulgar.

JOE F.—All-Hallow Eve, or Halloween, is the eve, or the night—somewhat akin to Christmas Eve—that precedes November 1st, that day being "All Saints' Day" in both the Roman and Anglican churches. This "Feast of All Saints," which arose from the consecration of the Pantheon, in the seventh century, to Christian worship, is still observed in memory of all who have not other days assigned to the commemoration of their virtues. The popular usages that are entwined about the sports of Halloween are chiefly relics of the old Druidical pastimes. The idea of its observance is that it is the time of all others when ghosts and goblins, spirits and fairies, are let loose to commune with mortals, and are given power to prevail from midnight until dawn, so that the curious-minded may claim a hope to peer into the dim future. Singularly enough, the entire bulk of freaks and tricks enacted, rilleries encountered and mishaps undergone, are all for the sole purpose of enabling the representatives of Pyramus and Thisbe to well along all lads and lasses to guess if they will marry, and when, and when. Burns poem on "Halloween" sketches spiritedly the various spells of divination played by the young of both sexes.

POOM DICK.—The habit of stammering can only be counteracted by the cultivation of the habit of correct speaking; and that can only be acquired by studying the processes of speech, the relation of breath to articulate sounds, the position of the tongue and the other oral organs in moulding the outward stream of air, and by a patient application in slow and watchful exercise. The lungs actually constitute a pair of bellows, and the mouth, in all its varying shapes, the nozzle of the bellows. The passage of the throat must be kept open, and the breath expelled by means of the ascent of the diaphragm not by downward pressure of the chest. The vicious habit of closing the glottis and compressing the organs of articulation must be overcome, and the air must be allowed to pass freely in and out of the lungs. All sound originates in the throat, and all effort in speech must be thrown back; it must be kept passive, yielding to the air, always opening to give it exit, and never resisting it by ascent of the tongue or jaw. The head must be held firmly on the neck to give fre vent to the attached organs. The great principle must never be lost sight of, that speech is breath, and that, while distinctness depends on precision and sharpness of the oral actions, fluency depends on the unrestrained emission of the air we breathe.

D. M. S.—1. A merry play at Christmas parties consists in laying on a table three dishes, one of which contains clean water, another dirty water, while the third is empty. Being blindfolded, the curious one is allowed three chances. If he dips into the clean he will marry a maiden; if into the dirty, a widow; if into the empty, the luckless or fortunate inquirer (as each one pleases) will be a single body for life. 2. Much sport may be derived from attaching an apple and a lit candle to either end of a horizontal stick, hanging by a cord from the ceiling, so that, while this is being whirled around rapidly, people may try, by jumping up, to catch the apple in the mouth. The feat results, in most cases, in losing one's balance, and thus tumbling full length on the floor, or in coming nearer than is agreeable to the flame and grease of the candle. 3. As lively a pastime is the bobbing into a tub of water after floating apples, causing some unhappy splurges, half stranglings, and many disappointments, the only way to succeed being to force the apple to the bottom, and then catch it between the teeth.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. B. SRECK, and Printed by WOODFALL and KINDER, Milford Lane, Strand.